

**Chinese fiction abroad:
the exilic nature of works by Chinese
writers living abroad after the Tiananmen
Massacre**

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This thesis has been composed by myself and is my own work.

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1. Introduction

1.1. How I got started

I met Xu Xing in the refectory of the University of Heidelberg in November 1989. He had just come to Germany and did not speak a word of German. I was three weeks into my beginner's course Chinese. Somehow, we could communicate immediately. I showed him around, tried (and failed) to teach him some German, and together we endured marathon sessions with the German bureaucracy. Through him I saw the bafflement of the exile first-hand: the mood changes, the daily frustrations, the poverty and the suspicion with which he was regarded, in particular by officials. Xu Xing also enjoyed, at times, financial success (usually spending money faster than he earned it), he had a circle of friends, and he enjoyed political discussions and Western technology. More than anything else, he enjoyed the company of women. After an initially difficult period, he settled down in a more or less carefree manner. Yet, homesickness prevented him from becoming completely comfortable with his circumstances. In particular, dissatisfaction with his own status (foreign exchange student? exile? economic migrant?) grew over time.

Thanks to Xu Xing, my Chinese improved more quickly than it would have otherwise. Yet by the time I left Heidelberg for China in 1992, it was still not sufficient to read any of his short stories, at least not for pleasure. I started to wonder which of his experiences he would build into his stories, what he had to say on his own status in a literary way, and what observations he had on his new environment. When I was finally able to read his stories in the original Chinese, the answers seemed to be, somewhat

disappointingly: "few, little, and none." Yet my interest was awakened. What did I expect? Was this exile literature? What was exile literature? Who were these Chinese writers, who were once famous in their homeland and now lived almost anonymously near my own home?

1.2. Why this thesis?

This thesis wants to shed light on the circumstances of writers like Xu Xing, who came to live abroad between 1989 and 1994. Although Chinese writers have lived abroad in the past, most notably during the first decades of the last century, and again following the victory of the Communist troops in the civil war in 1949, for nearly four decades afterwards very few Chinese writers had the opportunity to leave the country. Writers who left either in the aftermath of the 1989 demonstrations, or had already settled abroad because thaw periods in the 1980s allowed them to do so, are therefore of a new generation. This thesis wants to look at their work to examine to what extent these works are in the tradition of exile literature. It wants to draw attention to a literary phenomenon that is new and so far underexposed to popular or academic attention. However, it is not proposing to attract popular attention itself; this thesis is aimed at the specialist in the field of modern Chinese literature.

1.3. Selection of authors

In 1989 and the following years, Xu Xing was not alone in his experience of having left China and settled abroad, nor was he the only writer to have done so. It was therefore possible to draw on the experiences and the literary works of a variety of

authors. Since Xu Xing wrote short stories, I looked first for other short story writers (reasons for excluding other genres are given below). To find writers comparable to Xu Xing, the obvious place to look for was the most prominent journal of Chinese exiles in the 1990s, *Jintian* [Today], where Xu Xing's stories from the early 1990s appeared. Xu Xing's first works were published in China in official magazines: "Wu zhuti bianzou" [Variations without a theme] appeared 1985 in *Renmin wenxue* [People's Literature] and "Ji'e de laoshu" [The hungry mouse] 1988 in *Shouhuo* [Harvest].¹ The original *Today* was published in Beijing between 1978 and 1980 and edited by the poets Bei Dao and Mang Ke, leading exponents of the so-called Obscure Poetry group (*menglong shipai*).² Bei Dao was an active participant in the unrest that led to the mass demonstrations of Spring 1989.³ As a result, he decided to stay abroad, having left for Berlin to take up a four month stipend as visiting writer before the massacre on June 4th. Resident in Oslo in 1990, he took up again the editorship of his old magazine *Today*, when it was re-launched after a gathering of Chinese writers and intellectuals and sinologists in Oslo.

I decided to write a thesis on the works of four writers who had contributed to the re-launched *Today* from 1990 to 1994.⁴ Fiction was my preferred genre, so these writers had to have a body of at least two or three short stories published in the magazine. As it happened, one of the most consistent contributors of short stories turned out to be

¹ *Renmin wenxue* [People's Literature] 1985:7, pp. 29-41 and *Shouhuo* [Harvest] 1988:1, pp. 152-163.

² The history of the Beijing-based *Today* is told in Maghiel van Crevel, *Language Shattered: Contemporary Chinese Poetry and Duoduo*, Leiden: CNWS, 1996, pp. 63-8. A chronological list of *Today's* activities appeared in *Today* 1998:4, pp. 49-50.

³ For Bei Dao's role in the events of 1989 see He Yuhuai, *Cycles of Repression and Relaxation: Politico-literary Events in China 1976-1989*, Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1992, in particular pp. 400-401.

⁴ Unless otherwise specified, further reference to *Today* means the magazine since 1990.

Duoduo, a writer better known for his poetry. Another criterion was geographical: the writers should all have lived in countries whose cultures I knew well, not least to be able to detect the references they might make in their stories to the cultures of their host countries. Duoduo, then spending most of his time in the Netherlands, fitted this description as well, so he was included. Two more writers I identified according to these criteria were Liu Sola and Yo Yo.⁵

Ideally, these writers should represent the diversity of *Today* writers, yet it should also be possible to identify the links between them, their common goals and their common experiences. Proof of existence or absence of the latter would be one result of the literary analysis, yet the criterion of diversity was fulfilled in many ways. There were two men and two women. Xu Xing had always refrained from joining literary groups, while Duoduo was closely associated with the Obscure Poets. Yo Yo and Liu Sola may not even have considered themselves foremost as writers: Yo Yo had, in 1989, only recently started to publish her stories and Liu Sola's aim, which she was to realise after she left London for New York in 1992, was to devote herself exclusively to experimental music. Even the circumstances of their leaving of China were dramatically different. Liu Sola had left China long before the Tiananmen Massacre and had moved to London, for reasons that were not primarily political. Yo Yo and her husband, the poet Yang Lian, had moved to New Zealand in 1988, but his support of the 1989 demonstrators made an immediate return to China seem unwise. Xu Xing had left China precisely because of the massacre: he was on Tiananmen Square on the night between the third and fourth of June.

⁵ Personal names are romanised according to the writers' own preference where this differs from standard spelling.

Finally, Duoduo left China on that very day on a long-arranged trip to Europe, where he became, on arrival, one of the most prominent witnesses of the demonstrations and of some of the tension in Beijing in the immediate aftermath.

1.4. Why short stories?

Four genres are represented most consistently in *Today*: these are poetry, short story, essay and drama. Gao Xingjian dominated drama to an extent that focus on drama would have eliminated any comparative element.⁶ The contributors of essays have been mostly academics, and although often associated with the writers of fiction and poetry, they do not necessarily share their experiences. Poetry and fiction between them make up the chief content of *Today*, and any study of *Today* would need to examine both. For a study of exile writing, however, poetry is less useful than fiction. Nearly all the works discussed below are short stories of medium or short length, published in *Today* between 1990 and 1994. Very few novels have been written by Chinese writers living abroad in the 1990s. Instead, inspired by the commercial success of Jung Chang's *Wild Swans*,⁷ several non-fiction, semi-autobiographical accounts of 20th century China by mainland Chinese writers appeared in the 1990s. These accounts focused on the suffering of individuals, especially during the Cultural Revolution. Apart from having been written in English for an English-speaking audience (a topic to be discussed further below), there are several differences between this genre and the stories examined in this thesis. They are nearly all written by women, they all have parallel or at times intertwined narratives of

⁶ For a comprehensive study of Gao's work see: Henry Y. H. Zhao, *Towards a Modern Zen Theatre: Gao Xingjian and Chinese Theatre Experimentalism*, London: SOAS, 2000.

their personal experiences and historical events in China, and they all end their accounts with the arrival in exile representing a happy end without further elucidating the exile experience per se. A small number of writers have been able to engage in both genres. Min An-chee published a Chinese short story in *Today* in 1992; a year later she enjoyed both financial and critical success with *Red Azalea*, which she wrote in English.⁸ Zha Jianying contributed a short story titled “Jiemu” [Programme] in Chinese to *Today* in 1990, and also wrote a personal account, *China Pop*, of her experiences in China in English in 1995.⁹ In her case it is unlikely that she wrote *China Pop* for purely financial reasons, but the marketing success of autobiographies in the *Wild Swans* mould might explain why some writers prefer the autobiography to fiction. Most recently, in 2000, Yo Yo, after having contributed numerous short stories to *Today* throughout the early 1990s, completed her autobiography, which represents her first non-fictional work in more than a decade and is openly intended for commercial success.¹⁰

There are not many critical analyses of modern exile works. The most notable critical discussion of exile works are by Michelle Yeh,¹¹ Gregory B. Lee and Maghiel van

⁷ Jung Chang [Zhang Rong], *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China*, London: Flamingo 1991.

⁸ Min Anqi, “Ye juhua” [Wild chrysanthemum], in: *Today* 1992:2 (v. 17), pp. 223-8. Also: Min An-chee [Min Anqi], *Red Azalea*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1993.

⁹ Jianying Zha, *China Pop: How Soap Operas, Tabloids And Best Sellers Are Transforming A Culture*, New York: The New Press, 1995. Also: Zha Jianying, “Jiemu” [Programme], in: *Today* 1990:1 (v. 10), pp.10-18.

¹⁰ The plan for this autobiography existed for several years, yet her desire to continue writing short stories proved greater for a long time. Yo Yo also stated that she was looking for commercial success with her writing, and hope that her latest work would achieve this. Personal conversation, London, May 2000.

¹¹ See chapter two, titled “The poet as tragic hero: images of exile and transcendence” in: Michelle Yeh,

Crevel. No study exists that looks exclusively at short stories written by Chinese writers living in exile.

1.5. Background

1.5.1. The 1989 demonstrations

The opening of China after Mao Zedong's death in 1976 allowed literature to break free from the strictest political restraints. Throughout the 1980s, new literary streaming emerged and the political imperative that literature had to serve the people was gradually eroded. However, this was still not a period of complete freedom for writers, and political authority continued to establish itself through censorship and campaigns. The conflict and connection between politics and literature played a crucial role in the events leading up to the demonstrations of 1989.¹²

Already in the late 1970s, a symbol for the increased freedom of speech and the subsequent limitation of this freedom emerged in the shape of the Democracy Wall: a wall onto which people pinned so-called *dazibao*, big character posters, or self-made newspapers. These unauthorised public expressions did not survive for long, and the most vociferous supporter for increased freedom of speech, Wei Jingsheng, was arrested and tried in March 1979. He was sentenced to 15 years in prison: a severe sentence, which lastingly made Wei a figurehead and martyr for protest movements in China. In this

Modern Chinese Poetry: Theory and Practice Since 1917, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.

¹² Most comprehensively, the emergence of literary movements and the role of several key writers and intellectuals during this period have been chronicled and analysed by He Yuhuai in *Cycles of Repression and Relaxation: Politico-Literary Events in China 1976-1989*, Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1992.

capacity, Wei played indirectly a role in triggering the 1989 demonstrations. On 6 January 1989, the astrophysicist Fang Lizhi wrote an open letter to Deng Xiaoping on Wei's behalf, requesting his and other political prisoners' release in an amnesty.¹³ On 13 February, on the initiative of Bei Dao, thirty-three intellectuals signed an open letter to the Standing Committee of the Chinese National Party Congress and the Party Central Committee, supporting Fang Lizhi's earlier letter. These letters gained support among intellectuals in China as well as from academics abroad. More open letters followed, and an essay by Fang Lizhi was posted as a big character poster in the campus of Beijing University.

These activities did not in itself mobilise the hundreds of thousands of protesters at later demonstrations, yet they show the involvement of certain intellectual figures from an early stage, voicing their frustration with the political situation in a way that left them vulnerable to political attacks. Until 15 April, these activities only showed the latent tension in China's urban society: it became overt with the death of Hu Yaobang, former secretary-general of the Party Central Committee. Most commentaries and analyses use this date as a starting date not only of the demonstrations, but also of what is variously called the "Chinese Democracy Movement", the "1989 Democracy Movement", "Beijing Spring" or the "Student Movement". "Tiananmen", in particular, became a short-hand for

¹³ For this and the following dates I rely largely on He Yuhuai, *Cycles*, op. cit., (see in particular pp. 398-407) and Ruth Cremerius, Doris Fischer and Peter Schier, *Studentenprotest und Repression in China, April – Juni 1989: Analyse, Chronologie, Dokumente* [Student protest and repression in China, April – June 1989: analysis, chronology, documents], 2nd ed., Hamburg: Institut fuer Asienkunde, 1991. Both acquire their data from journalistic sources: He mostly from Hong Kong media, Cremerius et al. from a wider range of international news agency reports and Chinese newspapers. An official Chinese chronology is provided in People's China Press (eds.), *56 Days of Turbulence (April 15 to June 9, 1989)*, Beijing: New Star, 1989.

the massacre committed by the People's Liberation Army troops on the night from 3 to 4 June in Beijing, and as such has been used metonymically for the whole movement. The demonstrations, however, were neither limited to Beijing nor were they exclusively staged by students, therefore they will be called subsequently the 1989 demonstrations.¹⁴

The funeral of Hu Yaobang brought the first mass protests; from then on demonstrations became a daily occurrence and, in Beijing, the Tiananmen Square permanently occupied by demonstrators. Although by late May/early June the demonstrations seemed to have run out of steam, the government, having impended martial law on 20 May, finally used the military to clear Tiananmen Square of the remaining protesters. For the next days, until 9 June, demonstrations in other Chinese cities were dissolved, with or without the use of violence.¹⁵ During the Fourth Plenum of the Thirteenth Chinese Communist Party Congress between 23 and 24 June, secretary-general Zhao Ziyang was stripped of his post and succeeded by Jiang Zemin. The party-internal struggle that accompanied the demonstrations was over, all the demonstrations had been dispersed and this brought a close to the movement.

¹⁴ The extent to which the demonstrations spread all over China is best documented by James Tong, *The 1989 Democracy Movement in China: A Preliminary Spatial Analysis*, Hong Kong: Chinese University, 1994. Tong also identifies the peak of the demonstrations as 18 May, when a maximum number of cities reported a maximum number of participants in demonstrations. This can be linked to the highly publicised hunger strikes and the visit of Gorbachev to Beijing during 15 and 16 May.

¹⁵ The number of deaths is disputed. Cremerius et al., who analysed dozens of sources in *Studentenprotest*, op.cit., quote claims between 300 and 20,000. They state that after their analysis of all sources a figure of several hundred people killed seems more likely than a figure of several thousand, and tens of thousands can almost certainly be excluded from being a possibility; see page 3. The official Chinese figure speak of 300 deaths, of which only 36 were students: figures which are at odds with most eyewitness' accounts. See

1.5.2. Today

The re-launch of *Today* in Oslo in 1990 was the first public and joint reaction to the bloody governmental crackdown in June 1989 of an assembled group of writers finding themselves living in exile. To fund the magazine, the Today Foundation was set up which secured funding from several international foundations and the backing of well-known writers (Chinese and Western) as well as sinologists as advisers to the foundation. Bei Dao became the editor and his old friend Chen Maiping, a Stockholm-based fiction writer, served as editor-in-chief for the first four years. In 2000, Chen was still involved with *Today* as fiction editor. Mang Ke was still in China and not involved in this venture.

The foreword of the first issue was avowedly political yet also stressed the separation between literature and politics: "we oppose literary autocracy, encourage art to create freedom and promote the pluralistic development of Chinese literature."¹⁶ As pioneers of exile publishing, the contributors to the issues of the early 1990s created an atmosphere that was defiant and group-building. Letters to the editor were a regular feature of the early issues, fostering a strong link between readers on the one side, and editors and contributors on the other. Yet despite these group-building exercises, the contributors to *Today* did not go beyond this early stage of forming a political group of overseas Chinese writers.¹⁷ From the start, *Today* was as much backward-looking as it

People's China Press, *56 Days of Turbulence*, op. cit., p. 175.

¹⁶ *Today* editorial board, "Fukan ci" [A word to the re-launch], in *Today* 1990:1 (v. 10).

¹⁷ Yu Xiaoxing, "Haiwai Zhongguo zuojia taolunhui jiyao" [Summary notes of a conference on Chinese writers abroad], in: *Today* 1990:2 (v. 11), pp. 94-103, see page 103.

was forward-orientated. The issue number did not start at one, but at ten, to include the nine issues published in China a decade earlier.

Today never enjoyed a large circulation. The first issue was optimistically launched with "less than 10,000 copies."¹⁸ Another figure given is 3,000 copies.¹⁹ This declined further to 2,000 copies within a year. By 1995, most of *Today's* print-run was delivered to institutional subscribers: the low readership among Chinese living overseas proved to be a particular disappointment to the editor, who had not anticipated this development.²⁰ Soon, mainland-based writers were included among the contributors, possibly to retain a link with the home country, possibly to widen the readership. *Today* could have become a magazine exclusively for exile literature; instead it became a literary magazine based in exile.

1.5.3. The writers: biographies

1.5.3.1. Xu Xing

Xu Xing was born 1956 in Beijing to a politically well-connected family.²¹ His older brother followed a political career and has become a cadre in the Chinese Communist Party, whilst Xu Xing, from an early age on, showed a more rebellious streak.

¹⁸ Interview with Chen Maiping, Stockholm, 15 May 1995.

¹⁹ Unpublished Honour's thesis by J. Michael Farmer, University of Texas-Austin. Farmer told me (e-mail, May 1994) that he got the figure from an interview with Chen Maiping.

²⁰ Interview with Chen Maiping, Stockholm, 15 May 1995.

²¹ The following is based on an interview with Xu Xing conducted in Dilsberg near Heidelberg on 28 May 1994. Some bibliographical notes are based on numerous conversations the author had with Xu Xing during 1989-1992. Further information is from Xiao Qiao, "Xu Xing he ta de nüren he ta de gou" [Xu Xing and his wife and his dog], in: *Xiandai ren bao* [Modern People], 27 June 1989.

As a teenager he became, by his own account and inspired by the Red Guards, a hooligan. Before the age of 18, he spent some time in gaol. He has given different accounts of this on different occasions. Once, he claimed that he was punished for political reasons; on another occasion he claimed that he had been caught committing adultery with a married woman. It is not possible to determine which explanation, if either, is true.

In order to rehabilitate himself, Xu joined the People's Liberation Army after his release from prison. During his service, he was posted for some time in Tibet. After four years, his request for an extension was turned down and he was discharged in 1980; subsequently he was unable to find work at a level appropriate to his background. In the following years he took on a variety of jobs, including spending several years as a waiter in the famous *Quanjude* Beijing Duck Restaurant.

In 1985, Xu Xing's first story, "Wu zhuti bianzou" [Variations without a theme], was published in *Renmin wenxue* [People's Literature].²² Nearly overnight he found himself at the centre of critical attention. His success came four months after the publication, also in *People's Literature*, of "Ni bie wu xuanze" [You have no other choice] by another newcomer, Liu Sola.²³ Both writers were frequently compared or put together in one category,²⁴ termed variously as 'Stray Youth Fiction',²⁵ 'Modernists',²⁶

²² "Wu zhuti bianzou" in *People's Literature*, 1985:7, pp.29-41. For an English translation see "Variations without a theme" (transl. Brigitte Holland with Jonathan Hutt), in: Geremie Barmé and Linda Jaivin (eds.), *New Ghosts, Old Dreams: Chinese Rebel Voices*, New York: Times Books 1992, pp. 256-9 [note: this is a short excerpt], for a French translation see "Variations sans thème", in Xu Xing, *Le Crabe à Lunettes* (transl. Sylvie Gentil), Paris: Julliard 1992, pp. 9-48.

²³ "Ni bie wu xuanze" [You have no other choice] in *People's Literature*, 1985:3, pp. 4-29.

²⁴ See for instance: Chen Maiping, "On the Absence of Self", in: Wendy Larson and Anne Wedell-

etc. Xu Xing has claimed that after this success he could earn a living with his short stories without being a member of a writer's association.²⁷ In 1988, he took on a role as an actor in a movie partly shot in Tibet.²⁸

Xu Xing was actively involved in the demonstrations during the spring of 1989, taking to the streets with fellow writers and staying in Tiananmen Square until the tanks rolled in.²⁹ He has claimed a frank interview with a Dutch journalist got him into trouble in the aftermath of the demonstrations and so he decided to leave China for the time being.³⁰ He made his way to the Netherlands and, in autumn, from there to Heidelberg.

Wedellsborg (eds.), *Inside Out: Modernism and Postmodernism in Chinese Literary Culture*, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1993, p. 81, Wedell-Wedellsborg, Anne, "The ambivalent role of the Chinese literary critic in the 1980's", op. cit., p.141; or: Zhao, Henry Y.H., "The new waves in recent Chinese fiction", in: Zhao, Henry Y.H. (ed.) *The Lost Boat: Avant-garde fiction from China*, London: Wellsweep, 1993, p.10.

²⁵ Zhao, "The new waves in recent Chinese fiction", op. cit., p.11.

²⁶ Wedell-Wedellsborg, "The ambivalent role", op. cit., p.141. The pair has been grouped together so frequently that their names have become synonymous with that particular kind of literature of the time. For an extreme example, Wang Jing mentions Xu Xing ten times in her book *High Culture Fever*, nine times in conjunction with Liu Sola (see Jing Wang, *High Culture Fever: politics, aesthetics, and ideology in Deng's China*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, pp. 44, 139, 151, 165, 170, 175-6, 178-9, 180, 214, 233). This chapter will show how far away the two authors have grown, and how different their exile experience reflects on both life and work.

²⁷ Conversation with the author, 28 May 1994.

²⁸ *Beijing gushi* [A Story of Beijing]

²⁹ He Yuhuai, *Cycles*, p.440, confirms the joined action with other writers. That Xu Xing fled the Tiananmen Square after the troops marched in he told me in personal conversation, November 1989, Heidelberg.

³⁰ There may be some embellishment from Xu Xing's part, making his plight seem more dramatic. The magazine for which the journalist in question, Frénk van der Linden, worked in 1989 could not provide any article on Xu Xing, but kindly (through Michel Hockx, to whom I am very grateful for joining in the search) sent me an issue which features a report on the aftermath of the Tiananmen Massacre supplemented with interviews of local Chinese, among them an 'X' and a 'Chong Chi'. See Frénk van der Linden

Lacking secure financial support, he could at first not concentrate on writing but had to work where he could find a job, a situation not made easier by the fact that his German visa, a student visa which, with some difficulties, was obtained with the help of the Heidelberg-based sinologists Catherine Yeh and Rudolf Wagner, allowed him to earn money only during term breaks. On one occasion, Xu Xing worked for six weeks in a factory.³¹

His financial situation improved 1990 when he signed, during the Paris book fair, a contract with the French publishing house Julliard, where eventually a selection of his short stories was published in book form titled *Le Crabe à Lunettes*.³² The publisher's advance of Ff. 21,000 did not last long, however, as large parts of the sum were soon lost in a casino. Soon after, Xu Xing became addicted to fruit machines and it took him two years to overcome his gambling addiction.

The French publication had also a more positive outcome. Over the next year, his book received good reviews in major French literature magazines and literary supplements.³³ The editor of Juillard announced in May 1994 that the first edition with a print-run of 3,000 books was sold out and that a second edition would be published.

In 1990, Xu Xing was one of the founding members of the revived *Today*. For this magazine Xu Xing contributed two short stories, "Wo shi zenme fafeng de" [How did I

"Shocktoestand" [State of shock], in: *De Tijd* [*The Times*] 29 September 1989, pp. 24-28.

³¹ See Barmé and Jaivin, op. cit., p.259. The quote gives the impression that this was his regular work. In fact, it was the only time Xu Xing worked in a factory.

³² Xu Xing, *Le Crabe à Lunettes* (transl. Sylvie Gentil), Paris: Julliard 1992.

³³ See Alain Peyraube, "Les désenchantés de Xu Xing" in *Le Monde* 13 March 1992; positive reviews also

become mad?] and “Shiqule gesheng de chengshi” [A city which lost its songs], and a play, “Guowang yu ma de gushi” [A story of a king and a horse].³⁴

In 1991, Xu Xing was the first Chinese writer to obtain a scholarship from the Heinrich Böll Stiftung [Heinrich Böll Foundation], formerly reserved for exile writers from the USSR and later extended to those from Eastern Bloc countries. This scholarship included free accommodation at Böll’s former summer residence in Langenbroich, a small village between Bonn and Cologne. Here Xu Xing had his most creative period. He worked for nearly a year on several short stories and also wrote his play. In the latter half of 1992 he helped organise, together with the Böll Foundation, a symposium on modern Chinese literature at the University of Heidelberg. His speech on this occasion provoked controversy and led to his resignation from *Today*’s editorial board three weeks later.³⁵

In April 1993, Xu returned to Beijing for the first time since his departure four years earlier. In Beijing he obtained the approval for his divorce from his wife Wang Qin. Wang, a lawyer from Shanghai, did not attend the divorce proceedings; she had left China for Japan in the early 1990s to pursue a Ph.D. in Chinese literature.

In May 1994, Xu Xing left China again for Europe, visiting Germany and France, where he collected the advance for the second edition of *Le Crabe à Lunettes* before returning to Beijing in July. From there he reported that he had received very little harassment from the authorities upon his return, although his phone line was

appeared in *Magazine Littérature* October 1992 and *Lacroix* 21/22 February 1993.

³⁴ *Today* 1992:1 (v.16), pp. 56-61, *Today* 1992:3 (v.18), pp. 74-80, *Today* 1992:4 (v.19), pp. 151-6.

³⁵ This speech can be found in Xu Xing et al., “Zhongguo wenxue zai guowai yantaohui” [Conference on Chinese Literature Abroad], in: *Today* 1993:1 (v.20), pp. 239-253, especially pp. 240-251.

disconnected during his absence (his parents had kept his house) and he had been interviewed by the police on several occasions.

At the time of his final departure from Germany, Xu Xing had many plans but few concrete projects. The manner of his departure from *Today's* editorial board makes it unlikely that he will continue to publish there. He had made plans to extend a short story into a novel, describing a bicycle trip from Beijing to Shanghai he had undertaken with a friend in the 1980s. He also wanted to try and become involved more closely in the film industry.

1.5.3.2. Yo Yo

Yo Yo (Liu Youhong) was born 4 October 1955 in Beijing. Her family was both rich and well connected, even maintaining their privileges when one of Yo Yo's uncles was executed after the end of the Civil War for being a KMT functionary. The family managed to keep house and servants well into the 1960s.³⁶

After an education interrupted by the Cultural Revolution, Yo Yo developed an interest in all kinds of art. This led her to her first job as an arts editor for the Chinese Theatre Press shortly after the end of the Cultural Revolution. She also wrote and drew children's stories in comic format, painted and tried her hand at fashion design.

In 1986, she started writing journalistic articles. An opportunity to go abroad came in 1988, when her husband Yang Lian was invited to a reading tour in New Zealand and Australia. Certainly, at the time, Yo Yo could not have thought of this opportunity as the

³⁶ Biographical information is based on numerous conversations with Yo Yo in 1994, a more formal interview conducted on 10 June 1995 in Stuttgart, and the curriculum vitae she kindly provided.

start of an exile life. Her reason to leave China had very little to do with her own career, but she gladly accepted the opportunity to accompany her husband, who in turn was happy to leave not least because he had experienced a ban on his books in early 1987. During the 1989 demonstrations, which Yang Lian in particular supported with letters and articles in the antipodean media, they stayed abroad, and a return after the massacre seemed unwise.

Their status soon after changed again. The Chinese consulate in New Zealand refused a renewal of their passports. Faced with either returning to China or becoming stateless, they chose a third way and applied for New Zealand citizenship which they successfully obtained. As New Zealanders they became members of the Commonwealth, which subsequently would facilitate to a great degree their life in Europe and in the United Kingdom in particular. It also meant that they could return to China, albeit as tourists only. In Yang Lian's case there was some anxiety whether a return would be dangerous, but in December 1993 the couple returned for the first time to China; they have since visited China on several occasions.

Since living abroad, Yo Yo has continued to work as a painter and columnist, but also started writing fiction. Her penname Yo Yo is not exclusively used as a *nom de plume*. It derives from her husband's nickname for her and is the name she uses for all but the most official occasions.

As a columnist and essayist, she wrote for several Hong Kong and Taiwanese papers between 1991 and 1993. For the latter, she did not state any political preference by publishing in a wide range of newspapers and magazines, from the ruling party's

mouthpiece *Zhongyang ribao* [Central Daily] to middle-of-the-road *Zhongguo shibao* [China Times] to *Zili wanbao* [Independence Evening News], one of the main opposition papers. In addition, she wrote for overseas Chinese newspapers, mostly in Australia, where she contributed for most of 1993 to *China's Voice Daily* and *China Unity Times*.

After New Zealand, Yo Yo and her husband moved to Australia in 1993 where Yo Yo taught at Sydney University. A year later the couple moved to Europe. A scholarship for Yang Lian (sponsored by the German Academic Exchange Service) brought them to Berlin. There Yo Yo managed to secure solo exhibitions of her paintings in two galleries. Twice in the early 1990s Yo Yo was guest of the arts-literature project 'Yaddo' in the United States. In 1995/6 she was writer-in-residence at the Akademie Schloss Solitude near Stuttgart. Since January 1997, she and her husband have settled in London where they bought a flat in Stoke-Newington. London became their choice of permanent residence for a variety of reasons: as citizens of a Commonwealth state they could obtain permission to live and work in the United Kingdom, they both speak sufficiently good English but no other foreign languages (two years in Germany and a language course could not endear her to the German language) and there is also the proximity of Yang Lian's main market, Germany. Despite a steady trickle of income from his royalties, the main breadwinner has been Yo Yo since they moved to London. She has worked in a variety of jobs, but mostly in teaching, for instance as language teacher at the School for Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and at Westminster University. Since their arrival in London, Yo Yo has not held any scholarships or received any grants.

Despite her start abroad as a fiction writer, Yo Yo first tried to get published in Mainland China. The Shanghai magazine *Harvest* proposed the publication of her first

short story, "Once there was a mountain" but twice withdrew their offer; as they explained to the author, "the time was not right" for such a "pornographic" short story.³⁷ Eventually the story was published in Hong Kong in the magazine *Xianggang wenxue* [Hong Kong Literature] (1989:10, 1989:11). The Hong Kong version, incidentally, cut out what they deemed to be too offensive, whilst *Today*, which re-published it later, did not make any such cuts.³⁸ Further short stories published in *Today* are "Jianjiao de mutou" [Cries of the wood], "Huangxi huxi" [Faint] and "Xiao Meng niepan" [Xiao Meng's Nirvana].³⁹ Essays also published in *Today* were "Longzi (wai yi zhang)" (in *Today's* translation "Deaf" and "Days misspent"), although most of her essays were published in Taiwanese or Overseas Chinese publications: "Bolin mofang" [Magic Berlin], "Bolin sanji" [Essay collection from Berlin], "Nan de hukou" [Making Ends Meet] and "Liu" [Flowing].⁴⁰ She also contributed an essay to the publication *Breaking the Barriers: Chinese Literature Facing the World* which resulted from a *Today*-organised symposium in Stockholm in 1996.⁴¹

³⁷ Interview, 10 June 1995.

³⁸ "Congqian you zuo shan" in *Today* 1992:1 (v. 16), pp. 62-74.

³⁹ "Jianjiao de mutou (menglie)" in *Today* 1993:1 (v. 20), pp. 114-119, "Huangxi huxi" in *Today* 1993:2 (v. 21), pp. 35-49, "Xiao Meng niepan" in *Today* 1995:4 (v. 31), pp. 69-98.

⁴⁰ "Longzi (wai yi zhang)" in *Today* 1994:2 (v. 25), pp. 208-211, "Bolin mofang" in *Minzhu Zhongguo* [Democratic China], April 1992, p.9; "Bolin sanji" in *Zhongguo shibao* [China Times], 20 September 1991; "Nan de hukou" in *Xinwen ziyou dabao* [Independent News Report], 21 February 1992; and "Liu" in *Zili wanbao* [Independence Evening News], 16 April 1994.

⁴¹ "Opening the door to inner silence" in Wan Zhi (ed.), *Breaking the Barriers: Chinese Literature Facing the World – Essays From a Symposium for Chinese Writers at Bommersvik, Sweden 1996*, Stockholm: Olof Palme International Center, 1997, pp. 102-8. The Chinese version is published as "Kai xiang neixin chenmo de men" in Wan Zhi (ed.) *Goutong: miandui shijie de Zhongguo wenxue – Zhongguo zuojia yantaohui wenji*, Stockholm: The Olof Palme International Center, 1997, pp. 89-94.

Despite all those years in English-speaking countries, Yo Yo has been unable to find a reliable agent or translator for English translations. The only published translations of her works were into German, which led her to a German agent.⁴² A collection of her short stories, in collaboration with a new translator, is in preparation.

Much more successful, and given the paucity of translations possibly by necessity, have been Yo Yo's attempts to establish herself in the Mainland Chinese market. In 1994, two of her short stories ("Faint" and "Cries of the wood") were included in an anthology titled *Silent Journey Home: A collection of short stories by Chinese Writers Overseas*.⁴³ A collection of her short stories was published in 1995 under the title *She Saw Two Moons* as part of the series *Chinese Female Writers Overseas*.⁴⁴ A further collection of her short stories as well as a collection of her essays, both in book form, are currently in preparation.

In late 1999, Yo Yo completed a book to be titled *The Spirit of the Tide* which is part autobiography, part novel. It is not primarily aimed at the Chinese market but tries to fit into the niche created by such novels as Jung Chang's *Wild Swans*. The ongoing translation into English resulted in the publication of an excerpt in *Index on Censorship*.⁴⁵

⁴² "Huangxi huxi" was translated by me as "Nebelhaftes, Schattenhaftes" and appeared in *minima sinica* 1995:1, pp. 62-83. "Pao mao" [Casting anchor] was translated by Martina Kranz as "eingedockt" and published in *entwürfe für literatur* [blueprints for literature], 1996:3, pp. 26-31.

⁴³ *Wuyu guilu: haiwai dalu zuojia wencong xiaoshuo juan*, Beijing: Chinese Writers Publishing, 1994.

⁴⁴ *Ta kanjian le liang ge yueliang*, Changchun: Contemporary Arts Publishing, 1995.

⁴⁵ "The function of bathing", translated by Ben Carrdus in: *Index on Censorship* 2000:3, pp. 166-171.

1.5.3.3. Liu Sola⁴⁶

Liu Suola, whose name is often spelled Liu Sola,⁴⁷ was born in 1955 in Beijing. From a privileged background – her father was a cadre, her mother a writer – the family fortune was already declining by the time she was born. During the Cultural Revolution, her father was imprisoned whilst her mother was sent to re-education. Thrown out of the Red Guards because of her family history, the 14-year-old Sola was sent to the countryside in Jiangxi, but she was able to return to Beijing after only one. During those years, she received little formal education but had enough opportunity and leisure to familiarise herself with musical works of Western composers. In 1977, she entered the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, where she graduated in composition in 1983. After graduation, she started teaching at the Music Department of the Central Institute for Nationalities. She started writing in the early 1980s.

In 1985, Liu Sola suddenly entered the Chinese literary scene with the short story “Ni bie wu xuanze” [You have no other choice].⁴⁸ The publication of this short story happened four months after Xu Xing made his debut, also in *People's Literature*. Their impact was considerable, considering their status as newcomers.⁴⁹ A new, if short-lived,

⁴⁶ The following information is based on biographical sketches by Martha Cheung and Richard King from their respective translations of Liu Sola. See Cheung's “Introduction” in Liu Sola, *Blue Sky Green Sea and other stories*, Hong Kong: Renditions, 1993, pp. ix-xxv and King's “Translator's postscript” in Liu Sola, *Chaos And All That*, Honolulu: Hawaii University Press, 1994, pp. 129-134. Further biographical information on Liu Sola can be found on the Internet at <http://www.alsoproductions.com/artists/sola.html>

⁴⁷ According to King, she was so named to complete the scale do-re-mi-fa. See *ibidem*, p. 130.

⁴⁸ *People's Literature* 1985:3, pp. 4-29.

⁴⁹ Mainland critics grouped the two writers together already in 1986. See Li Wu, “Lixiang de miwang – lun ‘wuzhuti bianzou’, ‘ni bie wu xuanze’, ‘women zhe ge nianji de meng’” [Ideals at a loss: discussing ‘Variations without a theme’, ‘You have no other choice’ and ‘The dream of our generation’] in *Dangdai*

style was born, described by Henry Zhao as the “earliest representative works” for New Wave Fiction and he further categorises Liu Sola’s work as “Stray Youth Fiction”.⁵⁰ Attributed to this category are features like urbanism, individualism and an underlying nihilism.⁵¹

In 1987, Liu Sola composed her first rock opera, which, however, was never performed. In 1988 she represented China at a song festival in conjunction with the Olympic Games in Seoul. She then moved to London: no political reasons were given for this move. In London, Liu Sola continued to work in music but also on her career as a novelist. Her first novel, *Chaos And All That*, was finished in 1989. Another sudden career move followed: in 1991 she relocated to New York, where she again focused on music and joined an avant-garde band. She resumed writing in 1992 when she became visiting writer at the International Writing Program at Iowa University. She has recorded four CDs since then, produced several recordings of other artists and composed soundtracks for movies, theatre and dance productions. In 1997, she founded her own record company, *Also Productions*, in New York. In 1999, she returned to China for the first time since her departure in 1988 to perform a series of jazz and rock concerts with

wenyi sichao [Contemporary Art Trends] 1986:1, pp. 25-32. The third story with which Liu Sola’s and Xu Xing’s are grouped in the above article is by Zhang Xinxin, see: Zhang Xinxin, *Women zhege nianji de meng* [The Dream of Our Generation], Taipei: New Earth, 1988, pp. 1-82. A reflective view on Liu, Xu and other ‘modernists’ can be found in Jing Wang, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng’s China*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, pp. 137-141. Unfortunately for the purpose of this thesis, Wang does not extend her analysis to post-exilic works of either writer.

⁵⁰ Henry Y. H. Zhao, “The New Waves in Recent Chinese Fiction” in Henry Y. H. Zhao (ed.), *The Lost Boat: Avant-garde Fiction From China* London: Wellsweep, 1993, p. 10.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 10+11.

her musicians. A new novel has been announced to be published in 2000 by Ming Pao in Hong Kong.⁵²

1.5.3.4. Duoduo

Duoduo was born 28 August 1951 in Beijing.⁵³ The youngest of three children, he was first named Li Xiaoge (Li, the little revolutionary); later his name was changed to Li Shizheng. He has also used the pen-names Bai Ye, Bai Mo and Tantan. He entered high-school in 1964, where he was a classmate of Mang Ke, one of the original figures behind the Obscure Poetry group that Duoduo was to become close to later, and Genzi (real name Yue Zhong), with whom he shared a passion for singing and who was indirectly responsible for Duoduo's first attempt at poetry. Only Genzi, however, was able to realise their shared dream of becoming professional singer.

His formal education was interrupted by the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. His family was persecuted for being intellectuals: his mother was an opera singer,

⁵² The title Liu Sola gives on her webpage is *Da Ji Jia de Xiao Gu Shi* [Tales of the Ji Clan].

⁵³ Most of this biographical information is taken from Maghiel van Crevel, *Language Shattered: Contemporary Chinese Poetry and Duoduo*, Leiden: CNWS, 1996, especially pp. 102-7. Further biographical details were gained from: Carrie De Swaan, "Duoduo in Londen [Duoduo in London]", broadcast in the Netherlands, HOS, 21 January 1990 (the unpublished transcript of the recording was made available to me by the translator at that occasion, Maghiel van Crevel); Duoduo, "1970-1978 Beijing de dixia shige" [Underground Poetry in Beijing 1970-1978], in: *Today* 1991:1 (v.12), pp. 79-82, translated by John Cayley in: Zhao and Cayley, *Underground Undersky*, pp. 97-104; Peter Hoffmann, "Der ewige Feind des Himmels" [The Eternal Enemy of Heaven], in: Duoduo, *Wegstrecken und andere Gedichte* [The Road Travelled and Other Poems], translated by Jo Fleischle, Peter Hoffmann, Jürgen Ritter, Vera Schick and Sigrid Wallerich, Dortmund: Projekt Verlag, 1994, pp. 1-2; and from an interview with Duoduo in Leiden, June 1995.

his father an academic. The young Shizheng wanted to join the Red Guards. As Duoduo recalled in an interview with a Dutch magazine:

“I was even more ashamed when I realised that my mother was an extraordinarily beautiful woman, who wore high-heels, had permed hair and even wore lipstick: I wished so much that she were a stupid peasant.”⁵⁴

Instead, he “went on a train trip for three months through [...] China, to ‘link up to exchange revolutionary experiences’”;⁵⁵ the following years were characterised by frequent travel and revolutionary frenzy.

In 1969, he was sent to Baiyangdian to join a rural production brigade. He went together with Mang Ke and Genzi, and it was here that he first met Bei Dao. In autumn 1969, he returned to Beijing having contracted hepatitis and lived alone in his parent’s home. He remained officially a resident of Baiyangdian until 1975, only occasionally visiting it. After that, he became officially resident of Beijing again. The next three years he spent unemployed. He failed the entrance exam of the Beijing Central Philharmonic Society and instead, in 1978, became a library attendant in the Chinese Academy of Sciences. In 1980, he became economics editor of *Nongmin ribao* [Peasant’s Daily].

He married in 1981. A daughter born in April 1982 died in infancy: her nickname, Duoduo, was to become Li Shizheng’s most frequent penname. The marriage failed soon after their daughter’s death.

⁵⁴ Connie Eichholtz and Peter Sep (eds.) *Het Kantelend Wereldbeeld* [The toppling worldview], Den Haag: De Balie, 1992.

In 1985, he became a reporter at the *Peasant's Daily*. Three years later he was promoted to the paper's literature and art editor.

In 1989, he was invited to the International Poetry Festival in Rotterdam. His flight for his first trip outside China was scheduled for June Fourth, thus making him possibly the first eyewitness of the Tiananmen demonstrations after the massacre to speak to the international media outside China.

Afterwards, he stayed in London for a year, where he taught at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. In autumn 1990, he went to Canada as a writer in residence at Glendon College, sponsored by the Canadian branch of the International PEN; in the following year he held a similar position at Leiden University. Whilst in Canada, he acquired a residential permit, which considerably facilitated his subsequent visa applications for international travel and stays abroad, although it also required regular returns to Canada. He then gained a Heinrich Böll-foundation grant, where he followed Xu Xing in staying at Böll's former summer residence. This had, for Duoduo, the added attraction of being very close to the Dutch border. For a while, he divided his life between the Netherlands and Canada. Then he became writer in residence in Berlin in 1994, sponsored by the German Academic Exchange Service. In 1995, he returned to Leiden, but soon after, in January 1996, he took up another writer in residence-ship in Stuttgart, Germany, this time following Yang Lian and Yo Yo, who had just finished their own stay there. Since then he has settled

⁵⁵ van Crevel, *Language Shattered*, p. 102.

down in Leiden, where he bought a house with his Dutch partner, and where they live with their child.⁵⁶

Duoduo started writing poetry in 1972, triggered by anger and envy he felt when reading Yue Zhong's poetry. He can date the epiphanic moment of his first poetic creation to 19 September 1972: "The windows open like eyes" is the first line of poetry that "comes" to him. From then on he writes poetry.⁵⁷ His first works he exchanged only with his friend Mang Ke. Political reasons and fear prevented him from even wishing to have a wider circulation. With time, Duoduo tried to become more involved in the underground scene. He attended literary saloons, first as a singer, later in his new role as a poet and writer. From 1974, he expanded his literary work to include short stories. In 1980 he first published in *Today's Material for Internal Exchange*, but *Today* went out of business shortly afterwards and he could not follow up his initial publication. Despite this publication and his friendship to Mang Ke, Duoduo was never structurally involved in *Today*: consequently he did not share the fame of its contributing writers nor the persecutions during the anti-spiritual campaign.⁵⁸

Instead, Duoduo tried to gain acceptance over-ground in the 1980s. In 1982, he had his first publication in the official magazine *Chou xiao ya* [The Ugly Duckling]. Further official magazine publications included contributions to *Zhongguo* [China], a literary magazine co-launched by Bei Dao and Ding Ling in 1986, partially to rehabilitate

⁵⁶ Personal communication with Michel Hockx, February 1997.

⁵⁷ "Underground Poetry" in *Today* 1991:1, p. 80.

⁵⁸ van Crevel, *Language Shattered*, p. 104.

the latter with a younger audience. Ultimate mainstream acceptance was publication in *Shikan* [Poetry] in 1989.

The volatile nature of Chinese literary politics, with its frequent demands to toe a particular political line, followed by periods of more relaxation, was never a scene in which Duoduo actively participated: he was neither a follower of a political line nor was he the victim of campaigns. He continued to live in relative obscurity despite his popularity among fellow writers: he occupied the role of a poet's poet.

In 1985 Duoduo published his first fictional work, and ten stories followed up to 1989. But it was his poetry at that time which slowly gained him the respect of a wider audience: the late-comer Duoduo gained his reputation at a time when 'obscure poetry' was gradually going out of favour and other famous names were losing their popularity. In 1988, he was officially acknowledged by his fellow poets and awarded the title Poet Laureate of *Today*.⁵⁹ Duoduo himself brings into account his rejection of society and government as it was at the time and admits to have revelled in a self-appointed state of inner exile. This he thought particularly ironic when interviewed in his Dutch exile in 1995.⁶⁰

Although never involved in *Today*, in 1988 Duoduo became a member of a successor group called *Xingcun zhe* [The Survivors], around Yang Lian and *Today* founder Mang Ke, and served on the editorial board of their eponymous magazine.

The watershed came for Duoduo in 1989, when he became, for a short time, virtually spokesman for Chinese dissidents. This was by virtue of timing: Duoduo had not

⁵⁹ van Crevel sees this as a gesture motivated by some guilt; he also acknowledges Duoduo's status as an outsider which contributed to the late rise of the poet. See his *Language Shattered*, p. 107.

been prominent during the events leading to June Fourth. Not only Duoduo, but also his poetical work became immediately politicised; for instance, an already planned collection of his poetry in English translation had its title changed from *Statements* to the more dramatic *Looking out from Death*. Whether this was an attempt by the publisher to cash in on the tragedy, or to maximise Duoduo's exposure, it was not done on the poet's request.⁶¹

Duoduo's high profile gained him useful exposure: he was signed up by the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* to write columns, got into literary supplements and was published in the German *Lettre International*.

Translation opportunities also arose for Duoduo.⁶² Duoduo has since been trying to make a living as a professional writer, supplemented by his work as a columnist, scholarships and royalties.

1.6. Methodology

1.6.1. No exile methodology exists

Analyses of exile literatures rarely focus on the text itself. For example, a majority of studies on German exile literature of the twentieth century look at the lives and political actions of exiles; but do not provide an analysis of their fiction. Many German writers, often those with a financially secure position as Thomas Mann or Leon

⁶⁰ Personal interview, Leiden, June 1995.

⁶¹ For an account of the surroundings to marketing and publication of this particular poetry collection, see the report of one of the two translators, Gregory Lee, in *Modern Chinese Literature* (Vol. 8, 1994), pp. 277-8. See also van Crevel, *Language Shattered*, pp. 269-270.

⁶² van Crevel lists a dozen languages into which Duoduo's work has been translated, *Language Shattered*,

Feuchtwanger, became politically active, and it is their activities which are well documented. Textual analysis is carried on their speeches and letters, but rarely on their stories or poems.⁶³ Joseph P. Strelka searched for the influence of exile on the German novel and asks: “

“The salient fact about the German novel during the Third Reich is its cultivation on foreign soil; virtually all works of any consequence in the genre were produced by writers who left after 1933. This exile of creative genius has an indisputable significance in the sociology of the period’s art, but did it also profoundly influence the shape of the novel itself?”⁶⁴

However, his conclusion does not reveal any significant findings: “exile generated no consistent technical advances [but] it did affect the [...] content.”⁶⁵ The only distinct changes according to Strelka were “the employment of the historical past as an oblique comment on the current state of the novelist’s world [and the transfer] from the physically real world of specified particulars to the symbolic and general rendering of that world.”⁶⁶

p. 106.

⁶³ This is not just true for works on German exiles. A wide-ranging essay collection, treating exile writers as diverse as Ovid, Joyce and Ota Filip also concentrates on diaries and life experiences; the only incidences of textual analysis are comparisons of plots and characters with real-life happenings and persons, suggesting that these were exile influenced. See Roger Whitehouse (ed.), *Literary Expressions of Exile: a collection of essays*, Lewiston: Mellen, 2000.

⁶⁴ “The novel in exile: types and patterns”, in: John M. Spalek and Robert F. Bell (eds.), *Exile: the writer’s experience*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982, pp. 24-31. Quote from p. 24.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

1.6.2. Method.

For a literary analysis, all the fictional work of the key writers written since they left China should be taken in account. Most of these stories were published in *Today*. The stories in the next chapters are arranged chronologically. In this way, the development in writing styles, or the selection of themes, can, for instance, be linked to external events; it also allows comparison of the work of different writers on that level.

The analysis will be done through close reading. Each story will be introduced providing a brief synopsis and a description of its form. Narrator, main characters and setting will be identified, as well as extra-textual information where available: When was the story written? Where was the author when the story was written?

The analysis extends to two features: style and thesis. Style is here seen as a writer's preference for or dislike of certain linguistic features. Thesis is the ideological interpretation of the text. The interpretation starts with the identification of motifs and themes.

1.6.3. Theoretical background and terminology

In my terminology, I follow Prince who defines themes as "a semantic macrostructural category or frame extractable from [...] distinct (and discontinuous) textual elements which (are taken to) illustrate it and expressing the more general and abstract entities (ideas, thoughts, etc.) that a text or part thereof is (or may be considered to be) about."⁶⁷ Motifs, minimal thematic units, are more abstract than themes. Themes

⁶⁷ Gerald Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology*, Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1991, p. 97.

differ from thesis in that “the former does not promote an answer but helps raise questions: it is contemplative rather than assertive.”⁶⁸

For analysis of style I will take principles of linguistic study to examine the language of the texts. This is not intended to be an over-technical analysis; for instance the analyses below did not involve computer-generated word counts. In this linguistic analysis, I will follow Leech and Short who offer a comprehensive survey of linguistic methods for analysing fiction.⁶⁹ The main obstacle in applying such a model is the language: Leech and Short only analyse works in English. Some of their suggestions are therefore not applicable to Chinese texts: word-length, for instance; while on the other hand new categories could be introduced: prevalence of radicals, for instance. The analysis in this thesis will limit itself to a lexical analysis, mostly trying to establish frequent use of certain key concepts associated with exile, or neologism and euphemisms for the term ‘exile’; it will also look at the register of language and whether there are discernible ideolects. The discussion of mode of narration is also influenced by Leech and Short.⁷⁰

Textual analysis is limited in exploring external pressures on a writer, as well as the writer's self-assessment and motivation. For this purpose, I will look at the position within the literary field, here defined by the boundaries of exile, in which the writers are placing themselves or are placed by others. Most importantly, I will look to what extent these writers form groups or schools.

⁶⁸ Ibid., see also p. 55.

⁶⁹ Geoffrey N. Leech and Michael H. Short, *Style in Fiction: a linguistic introduction to English Prose*, London: Longman, 1981.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 259-72.

A definition of 'groups' (*shetuan*) and 'schools' (*liupai*) sees institutionalisation as the distinguishing features of a group. A school is not represented by a single institution but shares an ideology with these.⁷¹ Any member of a group or school is positioned in the wider literary field, which Pierre Bourdieu describes thus:

"Fields of cultural production propose to those who are involved in them a *space of possibilities* that tends to orient their research, even without their knowing it, by defining the universe of problems, references, intellectual benchmarks (often constituted by the names of its leading figures), concepts in – *ism*, in short, all that one must have in the back of one's mind in order to be in the game."⁷²

The main problem for the exile is to find the correct 'field' to establish him or herself. Echoing John Glad's question as to which literary tradition the exile chooses to attach him or herself to, Bourdieu widens this definition by asking the writer as a 'player' in the field to establish connections with a number of other players: for instance critics, scholars, specialist and non-specialist audiences.

⁷¹ I arrived at this definition after a conversation with Michel Hockx, 28 March 1996.

⁷² Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993, p. 176. For the applicability of Bourdieu's theories, and their limits, on Chinese literature see Michel Hockx, "Introduction" in Hockx (ed.), *The Literary Field*, op. cit., pp. 1-20.

2. Exile

2.1. What is exile?

The term “exile” is so broad, vague and above all so variously perceived that it is a difficult task to form a workable definition. Exile is both a physical experience and a state of mind. In a strict sense, exile is an involuntary dislocation from one’s place of origin or residence, while “inner exile” is used to express mental dislocation within one’s own country.

“Being in exile” is comparable to “being in love”: some people admit to being in exile (or love), some deny it, some who are not pretend to be or wish to be, some who are not wish they were not. Every person’s experience of either state has its individual features, and definitions vary from era to era and from culture to culture. The world’s literatures are full of tales of love and exile from their very beginnings. In two major religious groups, Christians and Jews, the story of humanity begins with the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Even the offspring of the gods are not immune from punitive exile: Prometheus, the son of Zeus, was banished from Mount Olympus and chained in perpetuity to a rock after he stole the secret of fire. The Greek story of civilisation begins thus with an exiled god.

The aim of this chapter is to describe the spectrum of exile experience and to formulate a definition of exile which is at the same time exclusive and comprehensive enough to allow proceeding to the next stage, an analysis of the characteristics of exile literature.

2.2. Terminology

The term for exile in most Western European languages is of Greek and Latin origin, composed of *ex*, “out”, “out of” and *salire* (a Latin loan word from the Greek), “to jump”, “to leap”. The Latin word *exilium* meant being sent away from one’s home or country as a punishment, usually for political reasons. However, there is a further concept in Old Latin, *voluntarium exilium*, which means a voluntary absence from one’s home or country.

Western languages distinguish between banishment and exile. Banishment is the punishment itself, as pronounced by the authority that meted it out. Banishment can only ever be received, it is not chosen. Exile is the state a banished person is in, but not all exiles are banished. Exile subsumes banishment, the more specific term.

The concept of exile also existed in China from the earliest times. The most commonly used terms for exile are *liuwang* and *fangzhu*. One of the earliest occurrences of the term *liuwang* can be found in the *Shijing* [*The Book of Poetry*]:

“Compassionate Heaven is arrayed in angry terrors;
Heaven is indeed sending down ruin,
Afflicting us with famine,
So that the people are all wandering fugitives; —
In the settled regions and on the borders all is desolation.”¹

The term *liuwang* is translated as “wandering fugitives”; Legge adds in a footnote by way of explanation that the people “are disappearing as if borne away on a

¹ *Shijing* [The Book of Songs], Part 3 [Daya]: Book 3 [Tang], chapter 11 [Shaomin]. Translation from: James Legge, *The Chinese Classics, Vol. 4: The She King*, 2nd edition, Taipei: SMC, 1991, p. 564.

current”.² The meaning of *liuwang* here is probably nearer “homelessness”, i.e., a condition caused by the famine which forced the poor to leave their homes in search of food, than the modern usage with its connotations of political persecution. The first character, *liu*, conveys the meaning of “drifting” indicating exile status, but it is the second component, *wang* (“to conquer”, “to subjugate”; but also “to die”, “to perish”), which gives the compound a severity that the Latinate exile never had.

The other Chinese term for exile is *fangzhu*. This term has been used as early as in the *Zhanguo ce* [*Intrigues of the Warring States*] and carries clearer connotations of banishment, without the threat of death. Possibly for this reason, contemporary Chinese exiles seem to find the term *fangzhu* more acceptable.

The first poem to address the condition of exile directly and possibly the first example of exile literature in China is “On Encountering Sorrow” [Li Sao], traditionally attributed to Qu Yuan (ca. 340-278 BC). According to the standard account of his life by the Han historian Sima Qian, Qu Yuan was twice exiled during his lifetime, each time after being maligned by jealous rivals at court. “Encountering Sorrow” was written during Qu Yuan’s first period of exile, after he was forced to leave the court of King Huai, whilst the second period of exile was enforced by King Huai’s successor (Huai having died as a result of neglecting Qu Yuan’s advice). The second time, Qu Yuan took his own life, drowning in the river Miluo. The term *liuwang* is used repeatedly in the *Li Sao* to describe his exile.

Most of the exiled writers discussed in this thesis were either reluctant to see themselves tagged with the label “*liuwang*” and suggested instead different

² Ibid.

descriptors like *piaobo* (to float) as in Yo Yo's case, or denied being in exile, as Xu Xing did.

Mainland Chinese critics have looked for less politically charged ways to explain the absence of a writer whilst still trying to discuss his or her works in their essays. One of the writers included in this thesis, Yo Yo, has been labelled "*liuxuesheng zuojia*", "a writer studying abroad", whilst both she and her husband Yang Lian have, more recently, been discussed as examples of "*haiwai huawen zuojia*", "Chinese writers overseas".³ There is an important distinction between this and the more commonly used term "*haiwai huaren zuojia*", "overseas Chinese writer".⁴ The former are [Chinese] writers who happen to be living abroad, whilst the latter are "overseas Chinese" who are writers.

Neologisms have also been introduced into the discussion. Bei Dao's status, for instance, was such described by Leo Ou-fan Lee in 1995:

"He has left Mainland China and also has suffered estrangement from the political authorities; although he is drifting abroad [*piaoliu haiwai*], his heart is still in China."⁵

³ Rao Fanzi and Fei Yong "Lun haiwai huawen wenxue de mingming yiyi" [Discussion of the meaning of Overseas Chinese literature] in: *Wenxue pinglun* [Literary Review], 1996:1, pp. 31-38.

⁴ See, for instance, the Hong Kong series *Haiwai wenzong* [Overseas Chinese Writers Series] (their translation), published by Sanlian shudian [Joint Publishers]. One example is Mu Lingqi (ed.), *Haiwai huaren zuojia sanwenxuan* [Essay Collection of Overseas Chinese Writers], Hong Kong: Sanlian, 1983.

⁵ Leo Ou-fan Lee, "Ji qin you liu de juligan: xu 'Wuye geshou'" [A sense of distance both close and far: preface to *Psalm of Midnight*] in: Bei Dao, *Wuye geshou: Bei Dao shixuan 1972-1994* [Psalm of Midnight: The Poetry of Bei Dao 1972-1994], Taipei: Jiuge, 1995.

In 1995, however, Bei Dao's wife and child were able to leave China and join Bei Dao in California, where he had bought a house. Bei Dao and his wife then separated and he is now living in Michigan. If Lee's statement was true before 1995, these changes presumably have affected Bei Dao's attitude towards both "drifting abroad" and having "his heart in China".

In the Chinese texts of the authors discussed here, or of fellow writers and critics writing in exile magazines such as *Today* or *Tendency*, there is no consistent terminology for the status of those who fled mainland China in 1989 or were abroad and remained there after the suppression following the demonstrations of 1989

2.3. History of exile

The earliest recorded tale of exile is likely to be that of Sinuhe, an Egyptian banned by Pharaoh Sesostri I in around 2,000 BC. In the expulsion of the Israelites from Egypt a whole race of people were sent into exile. Mass migrations are a form of voluntary exile. For the purpose of this thesis, the examples given below of Chinese and Western exile will focus on individual cases.

2.3.1. Imperial China

Throughout Chinese history, being sent away was a severe punishment, although "being sent away" always meant "being sent to the boundaries" and not beyond them. However, as the benefits of civilisation never stretched as far as those

places on the periphery, the effect was the same as being expelled from the country.⁶ Yet banishment had one grain of hope: unlike the death penalty, it could be revoked.

According to traditional Chinese historiography, the earliest ruler of the Shang dynasty disposed of his predecessor, King Zhou of Xia, by sending him into exile. Qin Shi Huangdi, annoyed with the lack of subservience shown towards him by his eldest son Fu Su, sent him to the northern borders of the Qin Empire.⁷

In Imperial China, officials were appointed to posts outside their home prefecture as a matter of policy. Given the vast size of China, an official could find himself very far from home, surrounded by a language, habits and customs quite different from his. Although this may be defined as some form of cultural exile, it should be kept in mind that most officials accepted travel as condition for the job, they were rewarded for their efforts, and their assignments only lasted a specified time.

An example of voluntary exile is given in the tale of Wang Zhaojun (53 BC – 18 AD). Wang Zhaojun was chosen to be presented to the Emperor Yuan Di. Deceived by a corrupt minister he failed to select her as royal consort; she was given instead to a Tartar leader, Huhanye, and lived the rest of her life in exile. As queen of the Xiongnu, Wang Zhaojun had considerable influence in preventing the Tartars from invading China. She remained queen even after the death of her husband by marrying his son of an earlier marriage. After he, too, died, she continued to stay in exile in order to raise her own son to assume the throne. She died of a broken heart

⁶ Much the same is true for the Romans, who sent those punished either to the border of their empire or just beyond, making in any case sure that the benefits and luxuries of their civilisation were not available to them.

⁷ *Shiji*, ch. 48. For an English translation, see: Derk Bodde, *China's First Unifier: A Study of the Ch'in Dynasty as Seen in the Life of Li Ssu*, Hong Kong: Hongkong University Press, 1967 (originally published Leiden: Brill, 1938), pp. 12-55, especially p. 25.

after a jealous Tartar leader murdered her son. Wang Zhaojun's willingness to submit to this form of exile was praised as a female virtue.

One of the greatest waves of exiles, which affected scholars in particular, took place during the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368), when the conquering Mongols, afraid of a powerful Chinese administration and wary of the cultural assimilation which had absorbed so many different cultures into China, abolished the exam system and sent many scholars to the border regions of China. The resulting idleness imposed on these scholars led, directly or indirectly, to the creation of some of China's most beautiful poetry, for instance that of Ma Zhiyuan, and also to the rise in popularity of Chinese drama.⁸

2.3.2. Chinese diaspora

Since the 19th century, the Chinese diaspora has spread to every corner of the world. Founded usually by economic migrants, its communities often have maintained a strong sense of identity and have kept ties with relatives in China. Whether or not their original reason for leaving China was politically motivated, there has never been a politically active Chinese community with sufficient media exposure or political skills to qualify as a political voice speaking for a majority of Chinese diasporic communities. These immigrants might be caught between the cultures to an even greater extent than exiles: they left voluntarily, not expecting to return (or in any case, return very soon), but they needed to assimilate. They were faced with financial and social pressure. An exile can afford to take advantage of his or her status as outsider,

⁸ There is, however, some evidence that the drama enjoyed popularity among the Mongols even before they conquered China and that they actively encouraged it. See William Dolby, "Yuan Drama" in:

even trying to make him or herself more marketable, for instance. Yet for the same economic reason the émigré has to fight hard to achieve the exact opposite: he or she wants to become an insider. Failure to do so (or failure to be allowed to do so) can result in the experience of persecution of earlier Chinese émigrés in the 19th century. However, the need to assimilate may only mean to assimilate within a certain cultural climate created not necessarily by the dominating native group; instead it may be enough to conform to the cultural standards implemented by earlier émigrés, for instance in the cultural hybrids of Chinatowns.

2.3.3. Late Qing, early Republic

The late nineteenth and the twentieth century saw some of the most notable figures of Chinese politics spend relatively long periods of time abroad. The great majority of these people were not exiles but sought a better future through study or employment abroad. Among famous political exiles were Sun Yat-sen and Liang Qichao, who both had a great impact on the course of modern Chinese history.

No-one was sent into exile from the mainland during the Republican period (1911-1949), although the writers Mao Dun [1896-1981] and Guo Moruo [1892-1978] became temporary refugees in Japan during the Nationalist purge of left-wing activists in the late 1920s.

Colin MacKerras (ed.), *Chinese Theater: From Its Origins to the Present Day*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983, pp. 32-59, esp. pp. 34-35.

2.3.4. Modern China

“A century ago it was said, wherever there is a coast, you will find Chinese people. Now it could be said, wherever there is water, you will find Chinese people.”⁹

2.3.4.1. Post-Civil War Hong Kong and Taiwan

Mass migration movements to Hong Kong happened throughout critical periods after 1949, so much that Hong Kong was dubbed a “safety valve” for the political excesses in China. This began in late 1949, when three to four million soldiers and civilians fled from the Mainland to Taiwan via Hong Kong.

Chiang Kai-shek’s flight to Taiwan in 1949 was intended to be a temporary relocation; Martial Law applied to Taiwan until 1987 indicating the ruling party’s desire to re-take the mainland and to re-establish their jurisdiction over all of China. This is a pretence which was never given up: under the long reign of the Nationalist Party, the existence of ministries for Tibetan and Mongolian affairs underline the government’s perceived right to legislate on these provinces. Furthermore, Taizhong served only as the ‘temporary capital of the Republic of China’. The parliament was constituted by representatives of all Chinese provinces, necessarily elected before 1949 and not being re-elected afterwards. With time passing, the pretence became farcical. More and more legislators died and could not be replaced, as there could be no election in their home counties, and the protest movement, mainly consisting of Taiwan-born Chinese, got stronger despite being excluded from the official political arena until 1988. Tension between Taiwan-born and mainland-born Chinese, now

⁹ From a manuscript by Ma Jian, my translation for *Index on Censorship*. The published version omitted the quoted sentence: see Ma Jian, “Citizen of a floating world”, in: *Index of Censorship* 1997:1, p.192.

including second generation Taiwan-born so-called 'Mainlanders', continue to exist. Those who arrived in Taiwan in 1949 saw their relocation as exile, involuntary and, as for its length, unpredictable. In turn, the oppression of Taiwan-born Chinese forced those opposing the Nationalist Party underground, or into exile.

2.3.4.2. Post-Cultural Revolution exiles

Restrictions of travel abroad were relaxed after the end of the Cultural Revolution. For the first time since 1949, Chinese writers could undertake independent reading tours in the West. Opportunities to teach and study abroad were also open to writers. These trips still required considerable skills in dealing with the authorities. For whatever reason, some people chose to stay abroad, at least for the time being, i.e., a return, though not imminent, was not to be ruled out. The persecutions after 4 June 1989 changed this, as a return to China had become not only unattractive but also potentially dangerous. These dangers varied from harassment (supervision, phone tap-ins, questioning by police, etc.) to imprisonment or worse.

2.3.5. Examples from 20th century Europe

The 20th century saw in Europe three major exile movements, affecting writers and intellectuals from Germany (and German-occupied territories), Spain and the former Eastern Bloc countries. There are important links between these movements. The German exiles, mainly but not exclusively Jews, Communists and Socialists, were fleeing persecution. Some fled before the threat of persecution became imminent, and their decision was justified by subsequent events. Even though many exiles of that period were not banished, they had reason to flee. It is difficult to

distinguish between exiles (i.e., non-voluntary) and émigrés (i.e., voluntary) from Germany at this time:

“It is generally accepted that just under 300,000 people escaped from Germany [...]. Apart from the large number of predominantly non-political Jewish emigrants, there was also a small minority of genuine political refugees. [...] The term ‘exile’ is used for both groups, the passive as well as the actively political refugees, because there was one circumstance which applied equally to all emigrants. Irrespective of the degree to which they were prepared to assimilate or integrate they all, at first, found themselves in a state of insecurity, of uncertainty, of being ‘unaccommodated’. In addition, the variations in social consciousness as well as the large number of individual motives do not allow a *universal categorisation valid for the whole period [original italics]*, of emigrants or exiles according to political convictions or activity (W. Röder). Numerous refugees who fled from political persecution as active opponents of National Socialism, sooner or later felt themselves to be immigrants and wanted to be fully integrated into the society of their country of refuge. On the other hand, many supposedly non-political Jewish emigrants refused to settle down permanently, favouring the idea of returning to their country of origin after it had been liberated from the Nazi menace.”¹⁰

The Spanish exiles were fleeing persecution for ideological reasons as well as fear of retaliation by the victorious Falangists. However, during Franco’s long reign

¹⁰ Gerhard Hirschfeld, “Introduction” in: Gerhard Hirschfeld (ed.), *Exile in Great Britain: Refugees from Hitler’s Germany*, Leamington Spa: Berg, 1984, pp. 1-9, quote from pp. 2-3.

the political situation became less confrontational and many exiles could have returned. In the 1950s, exiled writers like the 1952 winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, Juan Ramón Jiménez, were invited to return and to publish in their home country, an invitation which Jiménez flatly refused.¹¹

The exiles of the former Eastern Bloc countries (1945-1989) left their countries for varied reasons. For a start, the Communist Parties of the respective countries used exile as a political tool in more than one way, banishing dissidents not just as an attempt to punish an individual but at the same time also often successfully to deplete the ranks of disgruntled intellectuals at home. In the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), for instance, exit visas for long-awaited trips abroad, once granted, left some intellectuals with the dilemma that acceptance could mean once they had left the country, re-entry would be made impossible.¹²

The experiences of those exiles who fled from Spain, Germany or Eastern Europe thus differed from those individuals, who from the 18th century onwards fled “to a better life” in the colonies. This, too, has brought different perceptions of exile even when one compares closely related countries in the West. It is possible to discern differences between the point of views in English-speaking countries like the USA, Canada, Australia and Great Britain and those from continental Europe. Literary studies of 20th century writers like Ernest Hemingway, Henry Miller, e.e.cummings, and Jack Kerouac, by English-speaking academics emphasise their status as exile

¹¹ José María Naharro-Caldéron, “Juan Ramón Jiménez en el exilio: nostalgia, ética y obra (1939-1948)” [Juan Ramón Jiménez In Exile: Nostalgia, Ethic and Work (1939-1948)], in: Myron I. Lichtblau, (ed.), *La Emigración y el Exilio en la Literatura Hispánica del Siglo Veinte* [Emigration and Exile in Twentieth-Century Hispanic Literature], Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1988, pp. 38-40.

¹² The case of Wolfgang Biermann serves as a good example: in 1976 he was refused re-entry after giving a concert in West Germany.

writers, sometimes romantically, while continental European academics put emphasis on the mundanity of life in exile of writers who had to flee, focussing on their routes, their new social circumstances, etc. In short, the first group looks more at “what did the writer gain from his or her experience”, mainly in literary terms, whilst the latter’s underlying question seems to be the opposite, “what did they lose”, and the analysis is not limited to literature alone.¹³ This difference in perception is also illustrated by the broad definition for exile allowed in the anthology *The Oxford Book for Exile*. It includes, for example, travel literature.¹⁴ These differences may be based on different historical experiences during the last century. Neither the UK, nor the USA, Canada or Australia suffered mass exile movements, were occupied or had to endure foreign rule, nor did they fall under dictatorships.¹⁵

James Joyce is perhaps the most famous exile in modern English language literature. His case is of particular interest for a definition of exiles, as he drew his inspiration from his exile experience and his works are all set in the familiarity of his home town, Dublin. Joyce spent the larger part of his creative life in Paris, Zurich and Trieste. As a teenager he made a stand against Catholicism, leaving the Church in

¹³ See, for instance, J. Gerald Kennedy, *Imagining Paris: Exile, Writing, and American Identity*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993. Contrast is evident in works on German exiles such as David Pike, *Deutsche Schriftsteller im sowjetischen Exil 1933-1945* [German Writers in Soviet Exile 1933-1945], trans. Lore Brüggemann, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1981 (originally published by Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982 [the copyright of the translation predates the copyright of the original]), or Konrad Feilchenfeldt, *Deutsche Exilliteratur 1933-1945: Kommentar zu einer Epoche* [German Exile Literature 1933-1945: Comments to an Era], Munich: Winkler, 1986. This work also contains a complete listing of everyone who ever went anywhere in the 1930s.

¹⁴ John Simpson (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Exile*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

¹⁵ This, admittedly, is a matter of perspective. The vast majority of the population in Australia or the United States may feel that their countries were never occupied; Aborigines and American Indians are

1896,¹⁶ and throughout his life he met with controversy: publishers reneged on their promises of publication, and *Ulysses* was prosecuted for pornography. Still, Joyce was eventually published in Ireland, and he visited Dublin numerous times after he first left in late 1902. Initially, Joyce left Ireland to pursue medical studies in Paris. The death of his mother caused him to return, and the decision to leave again was for an altogether different reason. In 1904, Joyce met Nora Barnacle. He refused to marry her as he objected to the institution of marriage, leaving him in a situation where social pressure, motivated by religious bigotry, reversed the usual reason for an exile to leave home: Joyce's expulsion was by the public, albeit indirectly manipulated by the religious authorities, instead of expulsion by the political authorities who are often tacitly opposed by the public. This, too, is the reason why Joyce could easily return to Ireland but could not live there. It was not until World War I that Joyce was exiled by political forces: as an Irishman, associated with England, he could not stay in Trieste, which was associated with Austria. Joyce's last visit to Ireland was in 1912. The bitterness induced by a publisher's rejection on this last visit may well have caused him to stay abroad for the rest of his life, but it was a personal, rather than a politically motivated decision, nor was it forced upon him.

Joycean scholars, however, are still undecided as to defining the nature of his stay abroad. Williard Potts states: "[...] 'exile', as he somewhat misleadingly called his life abroad."¹⁷ Hélène Cixous attests both, "voluntary

likely to differ from this point of view.

¹⁶ "Six years ago, I left the Catholic Church, hating it most fervently" in: Richard Ellmann (ed.), *Letters of James Joyce*, vol. II, London: Faber and Faber, 1966, p. 48.

¹⁷ "Introduction" in: Willard Potts (ed.), *Portraits of the Artist in Exile: Recollections of James Joyce by Europeans*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979, p. xi.

exile” and “absolute exile”.¹⁸ Alessandro Francini Bruni, Joyce’s first friend in his life abroad, recollects in a not always reliable essay:

“Having become fed up with the Irish swamps and its croaking frogs, Joyce one day decided to take the great leap. Without making a fuss, he turned on his heel, leaving his father’s house and all family ties.”¹⁹

Another friend, Silvio Benco, on the other hand, describes Joyce as someone “who accepted exile.”²⁰ Finally, how did Joyce describe his own motives for venturing abroad? In a letter to Nora Barnacle on 29 August 1904 he writes:

“My mind rejects the whole present social order and Christianity - home, the recognised virtues, classes of life, and religious doctrines. How could I like home?”²¹

Joyce’s passion for Ireland’s fate, despite having to live abroad, combined with the hope of gaining in literary stature, is reflected in his play *Exile*:

“If Ireland is to become a new Ireland she must first become European. And that is what you are here for, Richard. Some day we shall have to choose between England and Europe.”²²

¹⁸ *The Exile of James Joyce*, trans. Sally A.J. Purcell, London: John Calder, 1976, p. 438.

¹⁹ Alessandro Francini Bruni, “Joyce Stripped Naked in the Piazza”, in: Potts (ed.), *Portraits*, op. cit., pp. 3-39, quote on p. 8.

²⁰ Silvio Benco, “James Joyce in Trieste” in: Potts (ed.), *Portraits*, pp. 49-58, quote on p. 52.

²¹ In: Richard Ellmann (ed.), *Letters of James Joyce*, op. cit., p. 48.

Here Joyce expresses in his literature the true sense of an exile: abroad, but still speculating about the future of his home country. Like the German satirist Heinrich Heine, famous for his ironical poems about his home country written during his exile in France, Joyce is not uncritically glorifying his past and his home in nostalgia, nor does he ever attempt to “go native”,²³ to achieve complete assimilation in his guest country. In the words of his friend Alessandro Francini Bruni:

“However ironically he may have treated it, Ireland was his agony. His spirit, particularly when he was depressed, would always return to Ireland. And if you were to ask him then what was on his mind, you would have heard a man discuss the torment of his country, showering it with mockery, while drowning his grimaces in a flow of unrestrainable tears.”²⁴

2.4. Dimensions of exile

The historical overview of exile, although by no means an exhaustive account of the phenomenon exile in the world’s cultures throughout the ages, already shows different reasons for exile. The two extremes, voluntary and involuntary, are also less absolute than the terms imply.

²² James Joyce, *Exile: A Play in Three Acts*, London: Grafton, 1979, p. 50.

²³ Joyce rather seemed to have developed his own multi-national traits, also out of necessity. The Joyce family communicated in different languages, and at one point it is reported that he and his brother Stan swore at each other in Italian; see Francini Bruni, “Recollection of Joyce”, in: Potts, *Portraits*, pp. 39-48

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

One can identify a range of exile, exile's dimension, from temporarily abroad to the physical expulsion from a country. On a scale of exile's severity, someone voluntarily temporarily abroad represents the least severe end: travellers, for instance, would come under this category. The length of the stay abroad contributes to a more acute sense of exile, as is the case for expatriates, who live abroad on a permanent basis, yet not for an indefinite amount of time. The émigré is similar to the expatriate, living abroad and planning to stay indefinitely. The involuntary émigré had to leave his or her home country because of indirect pressure; whilst the "true exile", that is the exile in the original sense, was expelled from his or her home country.

2.5. Inner exile

"Indeed, we bury ourselves in many places and become exiles even while remaining in our own land"²⁵

The dimensions of exile described in the preceding paragraph all shared the element of dislocation, no matter how temporarily. An exile category which does not include this element is "inner exile". Again, one can distinguish the voluntary from the involuntary inner exile. The voluntary inner exile shuns society, yet is inexplicably drawn to it, whereas the involuntary inner exile is shunned by society yet cannot or will not leave this society. Reasons for inner exile may be found not just in society, but also in society-defining superimposed religions or political systems. Inner exile can largely be excluded for the purpose of this study, with the exception of the exile who draws on the experience of having been an inner exile. Hana Pichova excluded in her own doctoral thesis on exile the experience of inner exile on the grounds that

“the artist [the inner exile] has [not] to go as far as to abandon his/her own country, language, culture, family, and friends forever.”²⁶

2.6. The changing situation of exiles

The situation of exiles is not in a fixed state. Changes may be gradual or sudden, sparked by events in exile or at home. The political situation at home does change, then a number of scenarios can apply. Firstly, the exile can safely return. Secondly, the situation for the exile has improved to a point where a safe return presents a possibility but not a certainty. Thirdly, the situation remains as it was or worsens, and a return would be dangerous. In all three scenarios, the eventual decision of the exile can be to return, because of or regardless to the changes. The alternative remains to stay abroad.

The exile may stay abroad for the following reasons: he or she might become dependent (financially, emotionally, career-wise, etc.) on the present location and is therefore reluctant to leave. The host country becomes then more attractive than the home country. Conversely, the home country might lose its remaining attraction, such as further changes to the worse (from the exile's point of view), the exile's family and/or friends have moved abroad, too, or died.²⁷

2.7. Symptoms of exile

2.7.1. Alienation and home

²⁵ Edward O'Neil, *Teles (The Cynic Teacher)*, Montana: Scholars Press, 1977, p. 23.

²⁶ Hana Pichova, *The Theme of Exile in Nabokov's The Gift and Kundera's The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1991, p.1, footnote 2.

"My home is my castle": one, idealised, definition of home incorporates the virtues of comfort, familiarity and trust. For those living abroad, unfamiliarity is often encountered unexpectedly and small cultural differences may suddenly become overwhelming. Dealing with bureaucracy, for instance, may not be easy in one's own country, but abroad it becomes even more difficult. A positive approach is to declare any misunderstanding, misfortune or inconvenience as part of expanding one's experiences. A negative reaction is contempt or ridicule. The traveller has the choice, and often does both. He or she might decide never again to venture into foreign regions, or contrarily may wish to set out again to repeat the experience, relishing being confronted with these challenges. But the traveller always knows that he or she is soon to be home again. The casual visitor can put up with slight discomfort; the exile, however, is denied the choice of returning home. There are two ways to deal with this: the exile either adapts or else tries to live according to his or her "old" life in alien circumstances. To do either completely is nearly impossible, but a decision to go in one direction or the other is nearly inevitable. Underlying such a choice of life-style is always the sense of loss, be it as trivial as not being able to get specific seasoning for a favourite dish, or, more fundamentally, not being able to communicate in one's native language. The exile is a stranger to the foreign culture but also becomes estranged from his or her own. To improve one's situation, the exile can try and make the new country home. This includes the denial of the old persona, it involves a re-invention of self. The most formidable obstacles in this undertaking are the language barrier and the racial barrier. It takes tolerance to identify with a sometimes hostile environment, yet with time passing, even the original home will

²⁷ For some of the dimensions of exile, I followed John Glad (ed.), *Literature in Exile*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1990, p. ix.

change, in ways unknown to the exile, without him or her witnessing the changes, so that the exile becomes ever more alienated. Home will then not only be in a different physical space but also in a different time sphere, and it is irrevocably lost. This estrangement, the alienation from home, is a key element of exile.

2.7.2. Nostalgia

How does one recognise such alienation, and how does the affected person express it? Alienation, although a psychological phenomenon, can in extreme cases lead to physical illness and death. In the 17th century, Swiss doctors first looked at seemingly inexplicable cases of psychosomatic illnesses found in Swiss mercenaries serving abroad.²⁸

It was then that the term “nostalgia” was coined:

“The German name [homesickness] indicates the pain from which the sick suffer because they are not any more in their fatherland, or because they fear never to see it again. Thus the French have called it *maladie du pays*, because it is an illness of the Swiss living in France: as it has no Latin name, I coined it *nostalgia*, from *nóstos*, the return to the Fatherland and *algos*, pain or yearning.”²⁹

²⁸ Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Exile*, New York: Free Press, 1979, p.1. Davis gives there as source the *dissertatio* of Johannes Hofer, published 1688. Unable to trace this thesis, I consulted Delia Frigessi Castelnouve and Michele Rosso, *Emigration und Nostalgia: Sozialgeschichte, Theorie und Mythos psychischer Krankheit von Auswanderern* [*Emigration and Nostalgia: A Sociological History, Theory and Myth of Psychological Illness Affecting Emigrées*], Frankfurt/M.: Cooperative, 1986, which includes excerpts of Hofer’s thesis.

²⁹ Frigessi Castelnouve and Rosso, *Emigration und Nostalgia*, p. 11. This and the following are my translations. In fact, neither Davis nor Frigessi Castelnouve and Rosso have been using the original source. The latter quote from F. Ernst, *Vom Heimweh* [About Homesickness], Zürich 1949, who in turn relies on a 1799 source, whose author claims to have translated and annotated the original Latin source.

Hofer describes it as “an often lethal illness”³⁰ and states that the sick can be recognised by a person’s

“natural propensity for sadness, antipathy towards foreign customs, disgust of parties, unwillingness shown towards jokes, the pettiest injustice or the smallest inconvenience, and a tendency towards avarice, the constant praising of the fatherland and the air of superiority towards all foreign regions.”³¹

The symptoms of the illness are described as

“constant sadness, the only thought being the fatherland, a light sleep or insomnia, fatigue, no response to feelings like hunger or thirst, anxiety, increased heart rate, frequent sighs, stupidity of the soul [sic] [...] and often frequently changing temperature.”³²

But Hofer realises where to locate the root of the illness:

“The suffering part is in particular the animated power of imagination, and especially the part of the brain in which these pictures of imagination are

This is not made obvious, see Frigessi Castelnouve and Rosso, *Emigration and Nostalgia*, p. 146, fns. 1 and 6.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

³¹ Ibid., p. 13.

³² Ibid., p. 13.

stored.”³³

The doctor gives as the only cure an immediate return home³⁴.

Originally, it seemed that Swiss mercenaries were especially affected by this new illness. Hofer recognises that other Europeans might suffer from it as well, but states the possibility that people from Switzerland, and from Bern in particular, are those most commonly “judged” by the illness. As for the reason, Hofer is reduced to speculation:

“I do not know whether it is because of the lack of the usual soups for breakfast, or for the beauty of the milk, or for the longing to the freedom of the fatherland.”³⁵

The term *nostalgia* describing a sometimes lethal illness has all but disappeared in modern usage. Distance has lost its awesomeness (the trip from Switzerland to France hardly evokes concern by those undertaking it) and the means of communication, i.e., how to stay in touch with home, have considerably improved since the 17th century. Nevertheless, despite the relative closeness of countries, once a return is impossible, as it is for an exile, it does not matter whether the return trip takes an hour or a month. There are, however, no accounts of mass outbreaks of a mysterious illness attributed to homesickness in more recent centuries, although if

³³ Ibid., p. 12.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 12.

only a fraction of those exiled in the 20th century alone had been struck by it, surely there must have been some attention to it. Instead, nostalgia has lost its medical and military connotations. Nostalgia is not even anymore the sinister twin of homesickness, which has remained a deplorable condition, if not a potentially lethal one. The shift in meaning, whether from the rareness of the illness, or lost awareness of its Greek roots (it is safe to assume that few English-speakers think of *nóstos* and *algos* when using the word nostalgia), has gone so far that it is now used to describe fashions from the recent past, perpetuated by media which declare that “the 50s are back” or such like.

The term “nostalgias” has been coined to indicate fashions or fads, such as

“the resurgence of interest in romantic comedy movies of the thirties; the rediscovered attachment to swing bands and ocean cruises; [...] the revival of literary interest in Scott Fitzgerald”³⁶

Literary phenomena which similarly exploit “nostalgias” are common. Pastoral literature in Great Britain at the time of the Industrial Revolution satisfied the craving for stories of a safer, more predictable past.³⁷ In China, “Root-seeking literature” became popular in the 1980s. The genre provided examples of the past as a golden age. Critics have detected element of alienation and nostalgia which seems to resemble an exile’s experience, yet the closeness of the movement to the upheavals of Cultural Revolution and the subsequent period of opening suggest that these

³⁶ Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, p. viii.

³⁷ This is well documented by Andrew Gurr, *Writers in Exile: The Identity of Home in Modern Literature*, Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981.

symptoms are those of the temporarily fashionable “nostalgias”.³⁸ Nostalgic fashions cannot be “real” nostalgia, as they are short-lived mass-phenomena and only caused by an undefinable “it” which show that the time was ripe for “it” to appear, and equally quickly “it” will disappear. Nostalgia can be seen as a general and as an individualistic phenomenon; only the latter is relevant to this thesis. Although one can be tempted to exclude extremely negative past experiences from ever becoming the object of nostalgia, like the Holocaust or the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima,³⁹ even this cannot downright be excluded, although it is probably impossible to determine how negative an experience has to be to exclude its possibility of re-emerging as a product of nostalgia. But do not some Russians nowadays feel nostalgia for Stalin? In the former GDR, this hankering for past times under “socialist” leadership is known as *Ostalgia*. In the increasingly capitalist People’s Republic of China, this phenomenon has been observed, too, and been dubbed “totalitarian nostalgia”.⁴⁰

To sum up, although nostalgia is nowadays not regarded as a serious medical condition, it is nevertheless a phenomenon people will have experienced in their lives. It is an individual experience as opposed to a mass phenomenon.⁴¹ It affects those living abroad more than those staying at home, although dislocation is not a condition, as the examples of “totalitarian nostalgia” show: a dramatic change of circumstances can trigger nostalgia without the element of dislocation. Nostalgia is expressed by the

³⁸ Kam Louie, “Introduction” in: Zheng Wanlong, *Strange Tales from Strange Lands: Stories by Zheng Wanlong*, Ithaca, N.Y.: East Asia Program, Cornell University, pp. 1-22.

³⁹ Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, p. viii.

⁴⁰ See Geremie R. Barmé, *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, pp. 316-344.

⁴¹ Davis devotes a chapter to the influence of the mass media, arguing that nostalgias are more and more common because they are now big business. See *ibidem*, pp. 118-142.

sense of comfort brought by the recollection of past events or by admiration for a glorified past, real or imagined.

Where then does the nostalgic experience of an exile differ from others? To start with, he or she is less susceptible to fashion-induced chronic nostalgia, as these are fads specific to a culture, which he or she cannot have personally experienced or if so, with a different slant to it.⁴² The glorification of one's home country, too, will hardly be as enthusiastic by someone who has been expelled or otherwise forced to leave from this very place. This is not to say that it does not take place to some degree, indeed, the memories of the country of origin may remain strong, but it is mostly a very specific country that is remembered: the country of one's childhood. Acute nostalgia might strike even those who suffered most at home; a Chinese exile may become increasingly defensive if he or she is exposed to a political environment where criticism of his or her home country is regular practice, even if he or she originally agreed with the criticism. It is one thing to criticise one's country, another to hear it criticised by foreigners.⁴³

The experience of German exiles in wartime London shows the pressure these exiles were under:

"It [London] was inhabited by the representatives of some of the great

⁴² For example, one of the best-selling nostalgic products in England in 1996 was the pop-song "Three Lions", referring to the "thirty years of hurt" of the English football team's inability to win any trophy of matter during the last three decades. It is unlikely that this will inspire anyone of African or Chinese origin living in Britain to bouts of nostalgia, but it also shows, given the song's popularity with an audience too young to remember the last three decades, that nostalgia as a mass-phenomenon can lead to nostalgia by association.

⁴³ My thanks to Perry Link who discussed this apparent contradiction with me during a conference break in Leiden, January 1996.

democratic movements of Europe which Hitler and the Nazis had tried to destroy. These political exiles had one central purpose common to them all: to maintain a political existence. Many of them showed great courage and high idealism in pursuit of this and nowhere, perhaps, was this more apparent than in the case of the exiles from Germany. They were the people who had not capitulated to the Nazis and had chosen exile rather than risk torture, imprisonment or death. Even though they were now in relative safety, they were regarded by many as enemy aliens, secret representatives of an odious regime, whilst their erstwhile supporters at home could too easily see them as cowards or traitors”⁴⁴

The situation for Chinese exiles is not as extreme: the host countries of the exiles are not at war with China, and the suspicion of spying is not as prevalent. Yet some suspicions remain, and anyone engaging in political activities, in particular when involving fund raising, can attract criticism. In a hatchet job for the Boston *Phoenix*, an American journalist criticises severely the role of Chinese exiles:

“After the bloody crackdown in China, a few brave student leaders escaped to carry on the fight from American shores. At least that was the story. Here’s what really happened.”⁴⁵

The exile is caught in a Catch 22 situation: trying to be successful abroad, he

⁴⁴ Anthony Glees, “The German political exile in London 1939-1945: the SPD and the British Labour Party” in: Gerhard Hirschfeld (ed.), *Exile in Great Britain: Refugees from Hitler’s Germany*, Leamington Spa: Berg, 1984, pp. 83-99, quote from p. 83.

⁴⁵ Yvonne Abraham, “Cashing in on Tiananmen”, in *The Phoenix*, 27 March – 3 April 1997. The article has been archived on the Internet at: <http://bostonphoenix.com/alt1/archive/news/97/03/27/CHINA.html>

or she becomes a target for criticism for trading on one's earlier misfortune, or worse, for betraying those who experienced suffering because they could not get away. Exile is seen as a privilege, and it is not for the exile to decide whether he or she is worthy of this.

Exiles from China are also less at risk than exiles from Nazi Germany were. The Chinese government is not as totalitarian as the Nazi government, the threat to dissidents is perceived to be lesser, even though it is still sufficiently severe to allow for exile.

2.7.3. Anti-nostalgia

The exile has one way of improving the condition of living abroad: making the new country home. As this includes the denial of the old persona, it involves a re-invention of self. The most formidable obstacles in this undertaking are the language barrier, and a racial barrier. Not even natives of different ethnical origin to those of their home country can completely avoid coming into contact with racist attacks, and it takes a good deal of tolerance to identify with a sometimes hostile society.

2.7.4. Alienation

Nostalgia is a product of alienation, although alienation does not have to lead to nostalgia in every case. Nostalgia can be triggered by a physical sense of alienation, if one is displaced from one's home. Home, too, does not have to be one's immediate environment or the place where one was brought up, but the place where one feels most comfortable in comparison to another place. To push this to an extreme: if there were regular interstellar contact in our galaxy, many people would probably identify their fortunes with planet Earth. If there is no comparison to make to other planets,

then one's continent becomes important, then one's country, one's county, one's street, or one's house. Alienation therefore starts at a very early stage in terms of distances, but it is only when an imaginary boundary is crossed that it becomes painful. For some artists, this may be the point when alienation becomes a source of inspiration. This kind of alienation is on a very personal level, even when caused by external events like banishment, and is the only form of alienation with which this thesis deals. On a personal level alienation is caused by many things, but the exile is especially susceptible to it.

As the example of the Yuan dynasty exiles shows, banished scholars were still allowed to work in and engage with their culture within the boundaries of their country. The dominating cultures of antiquity, be they China or Rome, extended their cultural influences up to and even beyond the periphery: although denied its immediate benefits, the exile still was still in contact. It is thus a very modern occurrence that exiles are forced to recreate their culture in an alien environment:

“although writing in exile has a long and distinguished history, [...] the phenomenon of a national literature in exile seems to be a distinct product of the twentieth century.”⁴⁶

The alienation from culture can even be triggered by the extinction of the indigenous culture, and all that remains has been scattered and can only be reassembled by those outside the original country. This has been the case for the cultural community in Germany after the rise to power of the National Socialist

⁴⁶ John M. Spalek and Robert F. Bell (eds.), *Exile and the Writer's Experience*, Chapel Hill: The University of Northern Carolina Press, 1982, p. xi.

Working Party. The Jewish community was one of the greatest contributors to modern German culture and with its disappearance (either into exile or enforced silence, before the Holocaust) and prescriptions by the Party on culture, it changed so dramatically within a short period of time that Thomas Mann could say: "It is not me who is in exile, it is all of Germany which is in exile. I am carrying Germany's culture with me." Others less fortunate, or less convinced by their own abilities to preserve their cultures, felt alienated to such a degree that it contributed to their suicide.⁴⁷

The melancholy of exile can in extreme cases lead to mania. The one triggers the latter, translated into an exile's fate it might mean that a pre-exilic melancholy develops into full blown depression. Gareth D. Williams analyses Ovid's *Ibis* for its exilic qualities and shows:

"(i) that certain manic-depressive tendencies can be detected in Ovid's exilic persona and are found to correspond with the analysis of melancholy and mania in some ancient medical sources; (ii) that his general state of exilic melancholy gives way in the *Ibis* to a heightened state of mania; and (iii) that in this respect the poem is no mere appendage to what is otherwise an integrated exilic corpus, but an important (even necessary) component in the psychological 'wholeness' of the collection."⁴⁸

His method is textual analysis in comparison with contemporary (to Ovid)

⁴⁷ One example is Stefan Zweig, who committed suicide in Rio de Janeiro, 1944.

⁴⁸ Gareth D. Williams, *The Curse of Exile: A Study of Ovid's *Ibis**, Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1996, p. 114.

medical sources to establish the nature of melancholy and ensuing madness. For a more general literary analytical approach, one finding is substantial: the link between melancholy and madness finding its expression in literary output, the madness might even have been induced by the creation of an exilic literary work.

Alienation is not necessarily tied to a place, or a time period. One can also become alienated from a person, even from self. The latter would cause self-loathing, or self-pity, to an extreme degree. The result of this alienation might be depression, ultimately suicide.

2.7.5. Identification

One can also define alienation by its opposite: identification. Elisabeth Bronfen cites three possibilities:

“Firstly, the identification with the status of or the existence as exile, where the danger exists that any form of assimilation will be refused and the state of loss becomes a fetish. Secondly, the identification with the country that accepted him [the exile] which at best can lead to naturalisation. Thirdly, the identification with the country of origin, where the danger exists of ossification in nostalgia.”⁴⁹

Some or all of these forms of alienation and crises of identity can be expected

⁴⁹ Elisabeth Bronfen, “Entortung und Identität: Ein Thema der modernen Exilliteratur” [Dislocation and Identity: A Theme in Modern Exile Literature], in: *Germanic Review* vol. 69, 1994:2, pp. 70-79, quote on page 71.

to be part of a literature which is written in exile, and therefore may lie behind concepts of what constitutes an exile literature.

2.8. Definition

An exile in the most precise meaning of the term is a person who has been punished by the ruling authorities of a country by banishment from this country for a certain period of time or forever. The punishment is meted out for alleged crimes, usually of a political nature, i.e., dissent, organisation of revolution, or such like.

The one group mostly, but not exclusively, affected by this punishment are those who had in the past held political power, be it directly as politicians, or indirectly as opinion makers such as writers, essayists, journalists or artists. Reasons for exiling members of this group include the government's fear of international outrage or economic sanctions if a prison or death sentence is handed out; fear of one person's followers who could not all be rounded up and may still be holding some power; or tactically to deprive an opposition movement of one of its key members. Even leniency may play a role: a person who in the past had achieved distinction by loyal or otherwise praiseworthy work may have later committed a serious crime which would have to be punished even more severely, were it not for the alternative punishment of exile.

In this thesis, the emphasis is not on those who hold political power but on the writers:

“It is fitting that the *writer* in exile is most often regarded as the exile per se. The quality that gives him his representative status is the tool of his trade: his native language, which he cannot abandon without simultaneously

surrendering his identity with the culture he represents. The problem of identity does not affect a mathematician, an architect, or a painter in the same way. Their tools and means of communication are much more easily understood and do not require the labour of 'translation.' Thus we speak justifiably of 'literature in exile' while we do not speak in the same sense of 'mathematics in exile.'"⁵⁰

A first concession to the narrowness of the definition above is the inclusion of those who fled before they could be tried by the authorities, often because they feared punishment harsher than exile. This may be a correct or a wrong estimation, and may also differ individually: it is an impossible task to gauge the extent of punishment preferable to exile. As the example of James Joyce shows, it does not always have to be the political authorities who are responsible for a person's exile; social or religious pressure may replace it as a reason for exile, and this is the second concession to make.

Exile is also an unstable situation. An exile may become exonerated, while in the contrary, an émigré might find him or herself exiled because of actions undertaken whilst abroad.

Bearing these concessions in mind, and allowing for the changeable nature of exile, all four writers discussed below were at one point during the late 1980s and early 1990s exiles in the sense of the above definition. Their work can therefore be classified as literature by exiles. The following discussion will establish whether this 'literature by exiles' is an exile literature.

⁵⁰ John M. Spalek, "Introduction" in: Spalek and Bell (eds.), *Exile: the writer's experience*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1982, pp. xi-xxiii, quote from pp. xii-xiii.

3. Xu Xing's stories

3.1. "How did I become mad"

The first of the two short stories Xu Xing published in *Today* was "How did I become mad". The story begins with the first person narrator, convinced of being afflicted by madness, describing his relationship with his doctor. The narrator is uncomfortable with the doctor's attempts to classify his case. Naturally, he sees himself as an extraordinary case, but for the doctor he is just another 'normal' case of madness. The narrator then explains how he did indeed become mad. It all started with a seemingly innocent habit: taking a leisurely stroll in the early morning. The narrator kept this habit for years, never changing his route, always watching the same people in the same environment, until suddenly a change occurred. A young man approached the narrator from behind and easily overtook him but slowed down as soon as he was in front. Deeply irritated by this behaviour, the narrator felt that he had been used. Yet not only was he a very slow walker, he was not interested in races or competitions of any kind. But from then on, his competitor appeared every morning and his morning stroll quickly turned into a race. The narrator employed various tactics. He varied his speed and tried to ignore the other man, but it was too late, he had lost the pleasure of his morning routine. Finally, he confronted the other person outright. At first asking politely for his reasons, he became very angry when he realised that he was the only one the other man ever had a chance to beat. Their mutual misunderstanding led to the other person becoming very angry, while the narrator 'goes mad'.

The main story is set in a road. The narrator reveals neither the location of the road nor his reason for being there. Whilst the opening monologue is set in the present, the 'race' on the road had occurred "nearly ten years ago." [p.57] Equally, the reader learns little about the narrator. Only his mental state is described, not his physical appearance. There is no reference to the narrator's gender; it is only an assumption that the narrator is male. The reader learns that he is an extraordinarily slow walker, covering a mere two kilometres in an hour and twenty minutes. The narrator rejects being labelled an intellectual, into which group he counts his doctor and implicitly all those fond of organising, categorising and labelling things:

"those who know, apart from their own character, everything, those one calls intellectuals." [p. 57]

His opponent is described in more detail. The "hard-to-cope-with jerk" [p. 58] has, at the first encounter, a "very docile expression in his eyes"; he even shows signs of being "shy and nervous", although the way he first looked at the narrator "could not be described as polite, rather as straightforward". He is wearing a brown suit, nothing flashy but tidy. He is always clean-shaven and his old leather boots are well polished, like "a man conscious of his appearance." [all p. 59]

The main theme, as signalled in the title of the story, is madness. The dichotomy between normal and abnormal is questioned here in the same way as by some famous predecessors, such as Lu Xun's "Kongren riji" [Diary of a madman] where the lunatic is

the only sane people in a lunatic world. This is alluded to in the I-narrator's juxtaposed description of himself when still a normal person:

"Before I became certified insane, I was very much aware of what was normal and what was not." [p. 58]

The story has an epigraph in form of a quotation from Aesop's fable "The tortoise and the hare". The narrator identifies himself with the tortoise:

"If I had to enter any kind of competition, I would rather be the tortoise in the hare-and-tortoise race, slowly, slowly climbing steadily onwards, that is it."
[p.58]

His opponent, however, refused to behave like the character from the fable:

"He was not like the hare [...], he was not proud, nor did he lie down for a long nap." [p.60]

The disappointment that the fable does not hold true in real life is a contributing factor to the narrator's madness.

The unequal race between the narrator and the other person is extended to another factor: social success. The narrator was the first on the patch but has never managed to become more than an observer of the life he sees every day. His one attempt at

interaction failed: when trying to pat one of the children on the head, he is told “to get lost” [p. 58]. Years later, when his opponent pats the same child, they soon strike up an amiable conversation, much to the envy of the narrator who had expected that the child, now a youth, would have been even less likely to understand such gestures.

The narrator’s obsessive dislike of categorisation is another contributing factor to his psychological decline. The lack of social interaction, the inability to conform to society’s standards and rankings, are early symptoms of the mental illness leading to the narrator’s madness.

Perhaps the most striking stylistic feature of this story is the use of a first-person narrator as well as the narrator’s direct address to ‘you’ [*ni*], the reader. His soliloquy at the beginning of the story, apparently describing his relationship with his doctor, soon turns into a rant against his pet hates. Only at the end of this opening address does the narrator turn away from the a single reader and towards readers in general:

“You are all mad, just let me go and ‘cure’ you.” [p.57]

The use of direct address adds to the immediacy and urgency of the story. This is further enhanced by the narrator’s habit of ending sentences with exclamative particles like *la* or *ba* and the frequent use of exclamation marks. Apart from these two features, Xu Xing’s style shows no idiosyncrasy. His prose is rhythmic and easy to read, his sentences grammatically structured with some use of classical, non-standard phrases, but he does not use phrases from his local Beijing dialect. The vocabulary is rich but not

over-specialised: of 60 phrases I compiled for an undergraduate class, all but one appeared in a standard Chinese-English dictionary.

Few changes have ever occurred in the narrator's life and he is happy with his routine. Change brings growth and solidity: children "grow big and fat" and trees "grow sturdy." [p. 58]

The story has a "before" and "after", signalled by the arrival of competition. The themes, madness and demands of society, show the narrator to be an outsider whose dominant feeling is that of frustration.

The choice of setting adds to the uncertainties with which the narrator is faced: the road has no discernible markers, its origin is never mentioned, and the destination is unknown. The journey is a metaphor of the narrator's life, and competition is society's attempt to steer him. Social interaction leads to competition and to addiction ("I was as if being hooked on heroin and unable to escape on my own" [p.60]) and addiction to ruin. The slowness which the narrator so appreciates reveals him as an outsider, as everyone else seems to be in a rush.

The story contains some ironies. The winner of the race in the fable becomes the loser in the race in actual life. The conclusion is that the weak do lose. The winner of the race, however, is not a hare as one might have expected, but could better be described as the second-slowest tortoise. This further enhances the negative mood of the story: the weak do not just lose, they lose to those just a little less weak than they are.

The narrator can be seen as someone who purposely excludes himself, not unlike someone in inner exile. The lack of an identifiable setting allows this interpretation. Yet

when inner exile is not an option any longer, there remains only further escape, a further distancing that leads into madness, or into a madness of exile. The condition the narrator is diagnosed with shows the severity of his situation and the lack of hope and ambition for the outsider to be re-integrated.

3.2. "The city which lost its songs"

"The city which lost its songs" was written a month after "How did I become mad" and was published six months later. By then, Xu Xing had just moved from a tiny room in a dormitory to the spacious and comfortable surroundings of Heinrich Böll's former summer residence.

The story is set in the city of F, a place obsessed with singing and singing voices. The person with the most outstanding voice in the city is the postman. But for his voice and an apparently insatiable appetite for food, he would not be an interesting character. In his forties, single, shy and taciturn, he does not possess any real friends. It is only when he steps on stage that he becomes a star.

In the run-up to the city's greatest song festival, it transpires that the postman might not be able to sing, as he is suffering from a mysterious ailment which has robbed him of his confidence. His situation worsens when he seems to lose his voice altogether.

At first the citizens of the city are genuinely concerned, but the postman remains withdrawn and does not reveal to anyone what afflicts him. Concern quickly turns to anger, and a public meeting is called. At the end of the meeting, under considerable pressure, the postman reveals his secret, albeit to the mayor alone. Seemingly shocked,

the mayor terminates the meeting, and soon afterwards he too shows signs of the same illness. The mayor cannot keep a secret and both secret and illness are passed on quickly until all inhabitants have lost their ability to sing. When no songs are heard anymore in F, the postman suddenly changes into an obnoxious, lecherous character.

The story's main theme is the difficulty of communication. The main form of communication and the motif of the story is song. This is a rather unusual choice, but serves to emphasise a pre-requisite for communication, self-confidence, as well as a quality, aesthetics.

The narrator does not only relate the loss of these but also reveals bewilderment at the ambiguity of communication:

"sometimes, what is an ordinary expression in some place will produce a completely different result in another place." [p.74]

This is followed by:

"Sometimes you think you could say or do anything at all; as long as you are within a model of normality, you would not cause any offence." [p.74]

The 'but' follows in form of the story, showing the narrator's surprise at the consequences that expressions can carry with them.

This is unlikely to be an autobiographical story. There no first-person narrator and no privileged access to the thoughts of the main character, who furthermore can hardly be described as having many physical similarities with the author. He is described as “too thin and too small, with a big head quite out of proportion to his body”. [p.75]

Yet the postman is also an outsider, as is made explicit in the following:

“He seemed urgently to push away this annoying outer part of the world, far away, the farther the better”. [pp. 75-76]

The world reciprocates:

“He had no idea about how people interacted socially; thus, although born in F city, and raised in F city, for the citizens of F he was nearly a stranger.” [p.76]

The outsider is only tolerated because of his outstanding talent. Once this is no longer in evidence, the mood turns. A mass meeting is called and the postman is asked to justify himself. Lest the reader is reminded of the Cultural Revolution, the author has the mayor of the town explain the “law against the contravention of the public will”. Song has made this society a gentler place, and their only law has given protection to the vices of the past. That past is said to be one hundred years ago, pointedly in 1984, thus alluding to the totalitarian state created by Orwell in his eponymous novel. [p.79]

The importance of song in the city's life cannot be overestimated. Nurses predict the singing voice of a baby at birth [p.74], police descriptions routinely include voice description [p.75], and even dating and procreation depends on one's vocal prowess. [p.75] Vocal prowess is equated with sexual prowess and loss of voice with sexual impotence. The theme of impotence can be expected in exile works: not just the powerlessness in a sexual sense but also in a political and social sense. In addition to the sexual metaphor, voice and song serve as metonymies for language and the written word. Like a singer losing his voice, the exile writer is robbed of his or her language. The exile writer has no or a very limited audience and exiles themselves feel alienated from their own language, over time forgetting words, cut off from the latest linguistic development, less and less sure about the more arcane parts of the language. As in the story, confidence is key to a successful performance: only a writer in command of his or her language can successfully create.

The concept of loss is seminal. Loss of voice is called a 'disease' but there is no reference to where it originated or by whom it may have been carried into the city. The 'disease' is also a 'secret'. No event in particular seems to have triggered it: it is not a biblical punishment by a higher authority nor is it something the society deserves. It just happens. The consequences although saddening are not extraordinarily dire. This shows the disillusion with the impact art can have, and the resignation the powerless exile feels.

As with the first story, this story opens with a narrator directly addressing the reader, reflecting on events to be described later on. Direct speech is rare and only used at the climax of the villager's meeting in the address by the mayor.

Song and language are first and foremost celebrated as liberating. Anti-social and unattractive as the postman is, he is part of the city's festival and remains an outsider, without harassment, throughout the rest of the year.

The ability to express oneself in an aesthetically pleasing way is a prerequisite to an ideal society. The talent to do so gives the postman qualities he seems to lack otherwise: self-confidence and the ability of social interaction.

The writer here expresses an ideal: to be heard and respected for what one communicates, regardless of one's personality or private habits. This is not only an ideal for artists, it is also an ideal for society to reach such a stage of tolerance. One reason for setting the story in the future could be the author's belief that no society has yet reached this level of tolerance.

3.3. Other works:

These two short stories constitute a very small body of work. Other stories Xu Xing wrote during his time in Germany were either not finished or never published, including some he wrote in the hope of publication in German translation.

His one attempt at a different genre, a play, was also published in *Today*. For completion's sake, this will be discussed briefly.

Titled "The story of a king and a horse" it is, despite its rather Fontainean title, an absurd play in the manner of Ionesco. Apart from detailed lighting instructions, it offers such ploys as actors hiding in the audience, muttering seemingly nonsensical lines once the spotlight catches up with them. After that, they assemble on the stage where they freeze into statues. The spotlight is also directed to fall randomly on real spectators, their reactions left blank in the script. After these preliminaries, the story develops, as told by a child. A king looks for a horse, his chief groom recommends another groom for this job, and this groom then finds a horse. Interrogated by the king about gender and colour of the horse, the second groom is unable to provide the correct details. The enraged king is calmed down by the chief groom who explains that this shows that the second groom only noticed the important details.

It is unlikely that the author intended this play to be performed. It is very short indeed; at most it could be made to last for fifteen minutes. The link between the two halves, the beginning a motley assembly under erratic lighting, the latter half the child's monologue, is the child's fruitless attempt to interest the statues in its story. Two elements remind the reader of Xu Xing's short stories. Firstly, the child narrator suffers frustration based on a lack or a loss, as in loss of sanity and loss of voice. The second common element is the use of fable: the tortoise and hare, the city which sings, the king and the horse are all seemingly child-like stories carrying a simple message.

In total, Xu Xing contributed to three of four successive issues of *Today* in 1992. Apart from his presence at the meeting that resulted in the re-launch of the magazine and

his stint on the editorial board, he further contributed to the group of *Today* writers by securing the funding for and co-organising a conference on contemporary Chinese literature in Heidelberg. His speech at the conference and a subsequent letter to the editorial of *Today* were the last two manifestations of contact with this group which he then abruptly left, before returning to China. His reasons for the rupture are most explicit in the first part, although the whole speech serves to illuminate aspects of his writing.

Xu Xing expresses his uneasiness about the term '*liuwang*' [exile] and '*liuwang wenxue*' [exile literature] as it was used on the invitation letter for the conference. His objections are two-fold: linguistically, he feels that the term is too harsh, with its connotations of death, flight from severe punishment and inability to return home. This was emphatically not the case for him, he stresses, nor were these the circumstances that forced him to leave China. Secondly, an exile literature for him means that one has been exiled for one's literature. Again, this was not the case. He acknowledged that the use of the term exile "makes us appear in Western society a bit more important." [p.240] For himself, he would describe his departure from China as having left through "lacking resistance and guts" [p.241] and suggests the term *fangzhu*. To further emphasise the active nature of his situation, Xu Xing prefixes 'exile' with "self-chosen, voluntary, self-" [*zijue ziyuan de ziwo fangzhu*] [p.241]

Xu Xing was not the only one to suggest *fangzhu* as an alternative to *liuwang*. Among those writers who spoke out against the term *liuwang* his reasoning was the most forceful and least diplomatic. By his rejection of certain labels, often attached by the host

culture, Xu Xing actually reflects his own exile status more than he succeeds in rejecting it.

Xu Xing proceeds to give two examples of 'genuine German exiles': Walter Benjamin and Stefan Zweig [the latter was actually Austrian], who both, according to Xu Xing, "killed themselves because of exile" (*yinwei liuwang er zisha*) [p.242].

He also points out that 'the exile writers' [the current Chinese group] at every occasion anxiously deny that their literature has anything to do with politics as it is a 'pure literature' (*chun wenxue*). "What kind of exile literature is this?" [p.242] he asks with justification. But he rejects exile as a defining label for artistic works for another, more fundamental reason: that it would limit and categorise the artist, who would inevitably have to serve institutions (like state or politics) to the detriment of artistic value and beauty. He concedes, however, that there are many definitions of exile and that he cannot determine the exact nature of an 'exile literature'.

Xu Xing's second concern in this speech is translation. Some part of this speech is very technical and does not need to be dealt with here, but translation is for the exile of immediate concern. Xu Xing laments the mutual cultural misunderstandings between China and the West and wonders how much translations suffer from these. He asks how much translators actually understand of what they translate, whom they translate, and how they translate and illustrates this with his favourite example: Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Emperor's New Clothes'. He does little to endear himself to his audience by claiming that contemporary Chinese literature represents the emperor, the manipulative tailor the Chinese writers, the fawning Emperor's entourage the sinologists

and the truthful child the Western audience. [p.249] In particular he accuses Western sinologists of following too closely the canon as prescribed by the Chinese authorities. [p.250]

In this speech Xu Xing mostly puts the blame for inefficient translations and bad selections on Western sinologists. In his "Letter to the editor", nineteen days later, he also blames *Today's* editors and contributors. He announces his withdrawal from the *Today* editorial board, claiming to be too lazy in his duties but also complaining about never having been asked to undertake any nor being informed of any of the *Today* group's activities. He then criticises the magazine's new identity: unlike the old version, which was honest even if also naïve, the new one was in danger of becoming a victim of affectation, much like magazines within China. What irks him is the number of Western sources used, the quotes in Western languages and the Westernisation of style, although the contributors were rarely proficient in any foreign language. Not knowing foreign languages also makes for dependency on translators, he pointed out. Xu Xing ends with comparing the magazine with an ageing actress with too much make-up and an over-loud voice. Nevertheless, he still hopes that there will be no need to distinguish in future between an old and a new *Today*.

This outburst left Xu Xing very vulnerable. Firstly, he announced his withdrawal from the editorial board in flowery, not to say pretentious, classical prose. Secondly, to underline his annoyance with the hypocrisy of using Western sources he likens these fashions first to the French court of the 18th century and then to Andersen's fable again.

Thirdly, his own command of foreign languages was very poor; he only started to learn German after having lived there for over a year.

Rather than accusing Xu Xing of hypocrisy, one can also see his naivete and frustration behind this outburst. His frustration seems to stem from his exile experience: the loneliness ('you never told me what you were doing') and the nostalgia (praising the old *Today* despite its shortcomings). All these are ordinary feelings whose experience is not unique to exile, but exile experience heightens them. Exile also made Xu Xing more aware of his alienation from his own culture, and he is alarmed that this trend is not mitigated by the exile magazine. This awareness was also acquired in exile.

3.4. Conclusion

Xu Xing's small body of exile works reveals relatively little. He does not wallow in self-pity, does not use words which one could describe as laden with the exile thematic and distances himself from both narrators and protagonists.

Xu's pre-exile work has much stronger autobiographical elements, and the characters have personal names. In the two exile stories, the characters are only identified by their occupation or their narrative function: 'that guy' and 'the doctor' in "How did I become mad" and the mayor, postman and secretary in "The city which lost its songs". Nevertheless, his last published short story before he left China, "The hungry mouse",¹ shows reduced autobiographical reference.

A recurrent technique is the use of fairytales or fables. Xu draws on both Western and Chinese sources for this. They are not based on superstition or folk-belief as Magical

¹ *Shouhuo* [Harvest] 1988:1, pp. 152-63

Realism can be. They are used to give the appearance of inconsequentiality, and together with the apparent flight from reality, show that the stories are indirect comments on the author's situation. The atypical settings of his stories supports the findings of Joseph M. Strelka of the German exile novel, that the exile manifests itself in the "transfer [...] from the physically real word [...] to the symbolic".²

The element in his stories that directly reflects an exile experience is loss: loss of sanity and loss of songs. Both stories describe a descent from a happy equilibrium (tranquil morning walks, uplifting musical concerts) to a state devoid of these pleasures. In both stories, this loss is brought in externally, beyond the control of the protagonists. Unusually, the loss is not lamented, and neither author nor protagonists sink into self-pity. An initial rage is followed by sad acceptance.

The protagonists of Xu Xing's stories are outsiders, whose alienation is increased after dramatic interventions: the narrator of "How did I become mad" refuses to conform and withdraws; the postman on the other hand becomes overbearing. Both solutions are pessimistic and negative.

Xu Xing's refusal to accept his status as an exile stems from the possibility of changing his status in the future and neglects to acknowledge the exile status quo. This ambiguity filters through to his stories: no acting figure has a name, either Chinese, Western or anything else.

Although Xu Xing's stories and play have non-specific settings, they include references to Western culture. The epigraph for "How did I become mad" is European,

² Joseph M. Strelka, "The novel in exile: types and patterns", in: John M. Spalek and Robert F. Bell (eds.), *Exile: the writer's experience*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982, pp. 24-31. Quote from p. 25.

and all the singing voices in "The City which lost its song" are described in European terms (alto, tenor, etc.) in Chinese translation. The only other Western reference is in the play, where a philosophical axiom is reworded as "I stink, therefore I am." This vulgarism is an escape from a more serious contemplation of cultural issues such as Xu Xing pursued in his letter and speech.

Finally, the narrator's slowness in a competitive environment in "How did I become mad" can be read as a critical evaluation of the West and as a critique of a Westernised China.

Xu Xing's stories do not offer any happy endings, do not offer solutions and do not even point towards the root of a problem. Superficial in this respect, they show the bewilderment of a writer who inexplicably experiences the losses of an exile.

4. Yo Yo's stories

4.1. "Once there was a mountain"

This is Yo Yo's first short story, written abroad in 1988 but not under the impact of exile. Set in Beijing, it describes an abusive love story. The couple are known only by the personal pronouns, She and He. The story is narrated from a third person perspective but with privileged access to the thoughts of the female; the male's thoughts are never revealed.

The story operates in two time zones. The frame narrative is set on a cold winter day in the present, as the protagonist remembers the origin, development and consequences of her relationship with him. They had met by coincidence; from the beginning she was nervous and afraid. A first date led to a first embrace but she was frightened and rejected him. The next stage of development was on his birthday when he proceeded further, fondling her breasts (the first time this had happened to her) and told her he loved her. Although again she tried to free herself from his embrace, she could not resist and soon lost her virginity. At another meeting, she learned that she was not his only lover. She had expected as much and considered leaving him in order to return to an ex-boyfriend, but then she realised she cannot stop loving him and stayed.

After this, she becomes his unresisting lover and they start cohabiting. She is sexually satisfied but remains unhappy, as she constantly doubts his true feelings for her. She also feels that he is the wrong man for her, and despite her desire for him, and her willingness to serve him, she wants to leave him. At this stage, she hates herself. She contemplates suicide but draws back from it.

Her obsession with him becomes an obsession with love affairs and relationships per se. Whenever she reads a book or watches a film, she draws comparisons to her own situation. She realises that she, too, is lying, if only to herself. Finally she gets proof that he does not truly love her.

The story switches back to the present. He has given her a beating and afterwards she walks the streets alone, looking for a home, but even when she sees a telephone she cannot think of anyone to call. She returns and they spend the night together. Lying on top of her, he makes her promise to belong to him forever. She obeys, but invokes the name of Nora (the heroine of Ibsen's *The Doll's House*) and wonders why she cannot leave. 'Can other women?' she asks herself.

There is no overt reason to class this as an exile story. It is set in Beijing and there is little to suggest that it could not have been written in China, or by someone who had never left China. On the other hand, there is nothing that suggests it is a specifically Chinese story: no cultural references are made, the setting in Beijing is incidental and there are no descriptions of specific customs or landmarks. Also, this is the only protagonist who is not married; she is also the youngest (20 at the start of the affair, 27 at the time the story is set).

A closer look at this story reveals features which occur throughout her works. This makes it a useful benchmark for her later works on the theme of exile. For example, the plot is not easy to follow, since there is little signposting to indicate the time sequence. The author uses an amalgam of poetic language, aphorisms, slang, vulgarism and dialect (mostly Beijing dialect). The text is sprinkled with references to Western

figures from Chopin to Derrida. The final comparison, where the protagonist sees herself as Ibsen's Nora as well as the importance of Lu Xun's essay "Nuola zou hou zenyang?" (What happens after Nora leaves home) may be more familiar to Chinese than Western readers, given the importance of Nora in the new culture movement in the 20th century, in particular for those concerned with drama and women issues.¹

Another feature of the author's style is her frequent repetition of certain words. *Qing*, "clear" is the most obvious example. It is linked with the gradual realisation of the true nature of their affair by the female protagonist. In the first part of the story, very few things are clear or can be explained easily: "*shei neng shuo qing*", "who can say for sure" [p.62], "*ta shuo bu qingchu*", "she didn't say clearly" [p.63], "*shuo bu qing*", "cannot say clearly" [p.63, twice], "*bu qing*", "unclear" [p.69]. Then comes her growing awareness of his lies: "*ta zaoyi renqing*", "already she saw clearly" [p.73], "*zhe yi dian ta kan de qing*", "about this she was clear" [p.73], "*ta hen qingchu ziji huo zai yi ge huangyan li*", "it was very clear to her that she was living a lie" [p.73].

Another term which Yo Yo and her husband would use later to describe their own situation is '*piaobo*', 'floating' or 'drifting'. The protagonist's regret is described as "bitter and sweet, invisible as the smoke, *drifting* where?" [Italics added, p.73] A stone can fly, it "drifts away". Two different characters for *piao* are used here but both can be used in *piaobo* 'floating'.

The recurrent motifs in this story are blood and pain. The pain, which is mostly mental, plays an important role from the beginning of the story: the pain of losing her virginity, the blood lost on this occasion which the protagonist wishes to shed again: first

¹ Elisabeth Eide, "Huaju performances of Ibsen in China", in: *Acta Orientalia* vol. 44, 1983, pp. 95-112.

to get her man, second to get rid of him. At both occasions she is the passive partner: the near-rape at the start she wishes to replace with a suicide, but as suicide requires initiating action, she wishes for a bloody accident.

4.2. "Cries of the wood"

Not so much a short story as an assembly of five different texts, "Cries of the wood" lacks a continuous narrative. The title story starts the quintet and is followed by another short piece titled "The stone that could fly", then by a poem titled "Speechless". The title of the fourth short piece is "Blue-frozen veins" and the sequence is concluded by a poem simply titled "?". These five texts were written at different places at different times, three in Berlin in October and November 1991, two at Yaddo in the USA in June 1992. They are not in chronological or topological order.

All five pieces are written as monologues. The addressee is not the reader but the protagonist him/her/itself: as the protagonist transforms him or herself into inanimate objects, all third person pronouns have to be taken into consideration.

In the title story, the narrator laments the fact that nightmares seem to have become so frequent. She describes one that had just occurred to her. She dreamt that she had turned into a stick, lying helplessly on a road where she is found by a group of children. She endures their taunting and physical abuse and is then thrown into a marsh pond nearby. Her suffering is that of a human being, but her shape as a wooden stick makes it impossible for her to utter any sounds of distress. The stick is then pelted with stones but before the swamp completely engulfs it, the narrator wakes.

"The stone that could fly" is a stone that the narrator finds floating in a lake. She takes it home and cherishes it as a 'magic' stone with talismanic effects. It has pride of place in her home until one day a visitor takes the stone out of its case and realises that it is brimstone and not a real stone at all. That night she dreams that she lies under a heavy rock, crushed nearly to death by its weight. She and the stone morph together and suddenly they lift off, flying into the sky. Transformed from agony to ecstasy, the narrator feels justified in her initial belief that this stone was magical. Then, the biological union between her and stone suddenly dissolves, and while the stone soars even higher, she falls rapidly.

The poem reads in full:

Speechless

That night you were pale.

A large, black foot across your nostrils.

Trampling your face.

The head is a white sheet of paper, walking away.

You lift the carpet. Under the carpet, a layer of eyes.

Blue eyes, black eyes, green eyes, red eyes,

Wild cat's eyes.

Rolling eyeballs, drooping slowly to earth.

Open-mouthed you cry for help. Not a sound. Run - the ground is not moving.

Mosquitoes are chasing you.

In "Blue-frozen veins" the narrator wakes from a nightmare and muses why she is so prone to bad dreams. This time she finds herself skating on ice, dancing with a man wielding a hatchet. The man transforms himself into a giant and disappears towards the sun; she is trying to follow him across the sea but while doing so breaks through the ice. She remains frozen in the ice all day. At nightfall, a couple approaches, dancing on the frozen water, and, as she has become part of the ice, dancing on her.

"?" takes the form of a list of the images occurring in her dreams.

?

Snapshots from dreams ----

Bloody battles

Blood

Chase

Coming out of hiding

Running (running without moving, unable to stir)

Wanting with all one's might to box someone's ear,

Unable to resist anything

Uneasy breathing

Falling: hurtling into valleys, but never falling down, suspended in

mid-air

Random grasping

random beating

random kicking

In the dream, your mother dies tears

Cold sweat

Waken in tears, waken startled waken laughing

Without continuity ---

Empty empty empty a thousand dreams ten thousand dreams

Forgotten forgotten multi-coloured chaos chaos chaos

a piece of

black

White white white white not waking up not shouting during a

nightmare

nervous

Open the eyes

The day is bright.

The last piece gives coherence to the preceding sequences.

The dominant theme of the dreams is the metamorphosis of the narrator into an inanimate object: a stick, a stone and ice. Other recurring themes are her inability to speak or shout, in particular while enduring pain, the image of flying or skating followed by sinking or falling, and separation from a companion.

This study is concerned with the dreams as fiction and not as a psycho-analytical tool for investigating the author's psyche. It is not necessary to know whether the author experienced such dreams herself.

The use of the second person pronoun adds to the intimacy of the prose. The stream-of-consciousness style adds to the drama of the nightmares. The language of the five pieces is, again, inconsistent. In the second sequence in particular, the author tries to write in the style of a classical fable. When the narrator asks herself whether the stone is not in fact magic, she uses the archaic question word *qi*; similarly, when asked a question, "she answers" is not a simple *ta huida* but *zhuren dao*. In fact, the first paragraph of that story does not reveal a narrator at all and it is only in the second paragraph that the vernacular suddenly slips in, and "you", *ni*, takes over.

There is the inability to communicate one's feeling, the loss of speech. There is also the fear of madness. Dreams are a form of madness, states the narrator:

"Dreams – are a madness that slowly transports you around the world". [p.116]

This is another aspect of the dream as leitmotif: the pain is unreal and the loss is unreal.

There is no external setting, but the author tells the reader the place names where the manuscripts were written. All five pieces are very self-centred. There is no external problematic involved, nor have the dream images any explicit interaction with the life of the protagonist when she is awake. The state of waking is mundane. In "Speechless", it is signalled by a mosquito, which ends dream and sleep alike. In "?", different images of the process of waking are used: crying, startled and smiling.

The reliance on self is underlined by the presence of others who only bring pain: the children 'hurting' the stick in the first sequence, or the friend revealing the narrator's foolishness in believing that she has a floating stone, in the second sequence. In "Blue-frozen veins", the protagonist feels jealousy, followed by self-pity.

The last piece is not only a dream inventory; it also functions and looks much like a bill. It is reckoning time, or at least the time to find out what is happening. These are possible parallels to the questions the author must have been asked herself about her nomadic life-style. The dreams are not all about pain and fear, for instance the last two lines of "?" are clearly positive towards the future and life affirming: "open your eyes, the day is bright."

4.3. "Faint"²

Another story written during her stay at Yaddo, "Faint" has some structural similarities to "Cries of the wood" but possesses a more linear narrative. The story is comprised of seventeen numbered vignettes. Some are of page length or slightly longer;

the shortest is a mere sentence. All relate events in the life of the narrator at different times. The character of the female protagonist, her original profession in China (editor of a publishing house), the events she relates, the setting and the experiences of a nomadic lifestyles in both the northern and southern hemispheres suggest that this story possesses strong autobiographical elements.

The first and last sequence of the story constitute the frame narrative. They are set in the morning and evening of one day in the year 1992 and narrated in the present tense. Again, the narrator's thoughts are described in stream-of-consciousness style, allowing the reader access to her thoughts. This is contrasted with the use of direct speech where the narrator speaks aloud to herself.

The frame narrative starts with the narrator waking up in an apparently familiar environment. Lying in bed and overhearing a muffled conversation from downstairs, she assumes she is at home in Beijing. She reminisces about life in Beijing, but then she gradually realises that she is not in China but in some unnamed place in a Western country. The second vignette consists mainly of the description of a beggar the narrator used to encounter in another time and place. The third part is set again in the present and sees the narrator musing about her accommodation, about home and about the meaning of the term 'home'. Part four is the recollection of an episode the narrator experienced in 1972 whilst travelling in Shaanxi. Parts five and seven are set in a park, where the narrator is relaxing and thinking. These two parts are separated by an earlier anecdote set in New York.

² *Today's* translation of the title is "In a trance". I follow the suggestion of Portia Wu to whom I am indebted for lending me a draft version of her translation of the story. For reasons of consistency, all

The next episode is the story of an encounter between a Western couple and a Chinese friend, all apparently known to the narrator. In episode nine the narrator looks at the night sky in the southern hemisphere and gives her reaction to the unfamiliar constellations. Later, she gets lost wandering in a city, unable to read the foreign street signs. Sequence ten is only the question: "Are you lost?" Episode eleven is the narrator's recollection of some country bumpkins she encountered in Gansu province in 1983. Sequences twelve and thirteen are further reflections by the narrator. Episode fourteen describes the ordinariness of her daily routine, her inability to learn English, her thoughts about dinner etc., but also introduces her husband. In the next episode, she visits a museum with a Western friend. Another short anecdote is followed by the final episode. The narrator has finished her work and takes the bus home. Again, she confuses her surroundings with those of Beijing, and gets lost trying to follow the route home as if she were in Beijing.

Yo Yo employs ultra-realism to describe the thoughts and appearance of her protagonist. Her descriptions are minute and in extreme detail: even the condition of the split ends of her hair is recorded. Unpleasant images are contrasted with pleasant images: there are stinking beggars and ugly, fat men, but also lovely landscapes, flowers, and young girls.

The language is a mixture of the refined and the vulgar. Some of the stories are very humorous, the language to some extent ironic and sarcastic. Dialects of Gansu and Shaanxi provinces are used, drawing on Chinese characters for their phonetic value only. Vulgarisms are liberally employed.

following quotes from the story are my own translation.

There are a number of themes in this story. Most complex is the question of home which is addressed here in different ways with quite different answers. Related to this topic is the comparison between East and West, or more precisely, between the China the narrator knows and the Western countries she travels to. These themes provoke reflection on exile, alienation and loss.

The story begins with the narrator waking up. Immediately, she assumes she is at home: home is where one wakes up. Home also is where one goes to work from, where one does all the routine things of life, what one has decorated as one wants it to: all things the narrator proceeds to do during the story. Home in this sense is not bound to any location; it is where one makes oneself at home. This independent and self-confident view was taken by the narrator when she was younger. Then home was indeed as easily defined by the narrator when she had freshly embarked on what was to become a nomadic existence. At that time, optimism prevailed. Home was transitory and one's independence cherished:

“Home is what you can hold in your hands, like two suitcases; packed in five minutes you can hit the road, carrying ‘home’ to wherever.” [p.37]

With time passing, the narrator experiences doubts. Something is missing in her life, and this something is home. She had thought that a modern person does not need antiquated values like home and is surprised how much she feels Chinese after all – which is paradoxical since in China she tried to be as Western and as ‘non-Chinese’ as possible. Things have changed since then:

“Only now do you know: what flows in your fucking veins is fucking Chinese blood, tradition is in your bones all over the place. Never did you think that this piece of soil would leave such a lasting impression on you.” [p.44]

Now, home is defined as where one is from. Childhood memories underline the regret of not having appreciated home then as one should have [p.41] Even children's names are more beautiful in Chinese.³ It is not even Chinese that it is the most beautiful language, it is the Beijing dialect [p.41]. One can detect in these definitions a descending order: home is everywhere - the rational, mature approach; home is anywhere - the idealistic, optimistic approach; home is somewhere [specific] - the irrational, sentimental approach. The narrator oscillates between these, and it is this which gives the story its tension.

The discussion about home is triggered by the problematic of exile. The exile compares here and there, now and then. The two different life styles are contrasted, although no overall comparison is undertaken. Life in the West is set at a much later stage, possibly in the present: the topics are mundane, from the fingernails that are growing too fast to the shopping, and it is also about earning money. Life in the East is set neither in the present tense nor, sometimes, in reality. It is depicted in dreams, flashbacks and reminiscences. It is not about earning money, but about observation of others, often on holiday.

The topic of exile is addressed directly in the repeated comparisons but the frame sequences even blur the distinction between home and exile, as in the use of imagery in these two sequences when daylight and dark come together in the final image of dusk.

The narrator misses her homeland. She misses Chinese people, Chinese children, Chinese food and Chinese characters. China is not seen as better or worse but is missed nevertheless. This surprises the narrator who had thought that her modern outlook on life, influenced by Western fashions when she was still living back in China, would have prepared her better for a life abroad. There is plenty of scope for cultural misunderstandings: when the newly arrived émigré Wang Fagen tries to adapt to his English-speaking environment, he introduces himself as Fagen Wang, which is misunderstood as “Fucking Wang”. In another episode, the narrator fails to make herself properly understood by her Western friend Anna [p.47]. Amusement quickly turns to anger. It is the differences between the cultures that make life so difficult, as the narrator experiences. The problem of assimilation is two-fold: not just how to but also how to avoid over-assimilation. The fear of the latter can be seen in the case of Fagen Wang. The author demonstrates the confusion by using different terms when the narrator refers to China. At first it is “inside the country” (*guonei*) [pp.38+47], but on another occasion it is “in China” (*zai Zhongguo*) [p.40]. Foreigners are politely described as “old-foreign” (*laowai*) but it then dawns on the narrator that she, too, is a *laowai*. As such, she feels alienated. Outside her familiar environment, she has started to talk to herself and she is in

³ See p. 41, where the narrator encounters a young girl called Dingding. It cannot be ruled out, however, that the remark about the beauty of the name is meant to be sarcastic: as a former comic artist herself, the author may well be aware that Dingding is the Chinese name of the Belgian comic hero Tintin.

fear of being seen as mad, or indeed of becoming mad. This fear is evident in three passages. First, she laughs like a madwoman:

“In the middle of the road you start laughing without being able to stop and passers-by cross the road in fear you could start striking out. Only mad people have such a laugh.” [p.40]

Her skills are not worth much in her new environment; frustration over this boils over:

“Never would you have thought that you are so useless, you might as well be an idiot.” [p.44]

Finally, her habit of speaking to herself causes her embarrassment:

“Everyone turns around: ‘Come again?’ You are frightened. ‘What’s up with me? Am I mad?’ You remind yourself: ‘Steady. If people know about your little habit they’ll assume you are going potty, then you’ve had it.’ You cannot help whispering to yourself.” [p.47]

Her alienation goes further. She is alienated in her new environment but has also come to realise that she would feel so back in Beijing. Letters from her mother inform her

about news from the capital. She is also alienated from her own body: she grows fat and the unfamiliar diet even causes her farts to smell different. [p.47]

All this leads the protagonist to reflect on her status and attempt to define it. This is a tentative step, and notable also are the omissions. The term exile is not used and one learns little about the background or reasons for her life abroad other than she grasped the opportunity to leave China when it came. It is not said why she lives abroad, where she should live, where she wishes to live or what should be undertaken for the future. Friends described her as 'a professional traveller' [p.37], a description she appreciates and which also amuses her. But she tries not to be over-dramatic:

"In how many countries have you been these last four years? How many cities? Impossible to count? Ah no, to tell the truth, it is quite possible. The world isn't that big after all. Certainly not, you ran once around, and now, four years later, you find yourself in the same city you started out from." [p.37]

Although there is no explanation for her life abroad, a return, even so seemingly desired, is not immediate. In fact, the narrator has few plans for the future [p.46]. Throughout, her nostalgia is evident:

"In the last two years, it is your memories which kept you alive." [p.39]

Surprisingly, here it is two years, whereas in the preceding quote it is four years. Either something happened after two years that changed the status - from happily living abroad to exile perhaps? – or it is simply a ‘continuity error’ by the author. Another explanation is that about one and half years after Yo Yo and her husband left China, the Tiananmen massacre happened.

Nostalgia can be seen in descriptions of things or events the narrator misses most. In the southern hemisphere, she misses the familiar constellations, the seasons and even the swallows. [p.42] Seeing Chinese characters advertising a restaurant, she is overcome with joy and starts to cry. [p.43] Such experiences are repeated: she sees a (Western) woman wearing a T-shirt with the Chinese character for dragon, and decides to follow her just because she is attracted to the Chinese character [p.45]. Her nostalgia even extends to the Cultural Revolution, when she recalls a song of that period [p.44].

Although the narrator is aware of falling into the trap of self-pity, she cannot avoid thinking of what she has lost: her way of life, her language and her reading ability (unable as she seemingly is to learn a foreign language). All these lead to a loss of confidence and the feeling of uselessness, coupled with a loss of status. We may see here the most obvious attempt by the author to deal with her situation in a literary context. The definition of exile is too harsh to apply to her.⁴ In interviews with German newspapers, however, she does promote herself as an exile. The reason for this might be that it is easier to concede a more extreme definition in a foreign language to start with. There is

⁴ Interview, June 1995.

also the hope that more attention will be paid to her as an exile than if she were only an expatriate.

4.4. "Xiao Meng's Nirvana"

One of Yo Yo's longest short stories, "Xiao Meng's Nirvana" was written during her stay at Schloss Solitude near Stuttgart. It is the story of a Chinese woman in her 30s, living in a period of social change and trying to adapt her personal life. For this purpose, she invents an alter ego called Xiao Meng (Little Dream), who helps her in coming to terms with the way she lives now and the way she wants to live in the future.

Although the possibility that this is an autobiographical story cannot be ruled out, there are very few pointers which would one allow to draw parallels between the narrator and the author. To add to the complication, the I-narrator and the other main character in the story, the eponymous Xiao Meng, might equally well be partially inspired by the author's own experiences.

The story is set in post-reform (1980s or 1990s) Beijing, and consists mostly of internal monologue, interspersed by dialogues between the I-narrator and Xiao Meng, initially portrayed as the narrator's best friend, as well as between the I-narrator and her husband. Xiao Meng is described as six years younger as the narrator. The I-narrator is aware of the age gap between herself and Xiao Meng, which seems to be larger by the exaggerated use of two different modes: the conservative "I" often falls back on phrases learned from communist propaganda, while the post-modern Xiao Meng uses 'hip' language.

The story starts with a conversation between Xiao Meng and the I-narrator. They talk about values, and how they deplore people who moan. The two disagree about other attitudes: the hedonistic, liberal, selfish Xiao Meng opposes the timid, conservative, altruistic I-narrator.

The I-narrator muses about Xiao Meng: how long she has known her, how old she is, what opinions she has. This leads her to reflect on her own situation: her marriage of eight years, and her still being childless. This makes her imagine life as a mother, and how she and her child would behave and act.

When Xiao Meng enters her life again after a brief absence, she gives the narrator a shock by sporting a daring new, asymmetric haircut. Claiming that because of this latest fashion statement she is afraid of returning too soon to her parents' home, where she lives, she asks the narrator whether she can stay at her place for a while. Then she proceeds to give the narrator a long lecture on the futility of idealism.

In another episode, Xiao Meng has secured two tickets for a pop concert. After lengthy fashion consultations, the two arrive at the concert, which proves to be too modern, unmelodic and noisy for the narrator's taste. Her disapproval leads to an argument between the two. After that, Xiao Meng continues to live in the narrator's flat without showing any signs of being in a hurry to return to her parents.

The narrator's continued internal debate about motherhood leads her to dream about her uterus, which in turn makes her visit a gynaecologist. He is only the second man ever to have seen her naked. Her husband reacts with anger and jealousy after she returns, and she remembers how excited he was when he discovered that she was still a virgin. This, she now suspects, is the main reason why he married her.

Life normalises after Xiao Meng disappears for a while. The narrator succumbs to her obsession with cleaning, which she links to the onset of her menstrual period. She reminisces on past discussions with Xiao Meng, and how the latter noticed that she possesses a blue eye in her stomach – the first clear hint in the story that Xiao Meng might not be as real as she seems to be.

Being without Xiao Meng makes her realise the staleness of her marriage. She forces herself to go out on her own and have a meal somewhere, lying to her husband about where she has been.⁵ He starts a fight anyway when he discovers that she has not prepared supper for him.

Xiao Meng suddenly returns, wilder than ever, now sporting a third eye on her forehead and recounting a fabulous story about how she had toured China and the world as an actress. The narrator reacts with shock to Xiao Meng's return, falls ill and asks her to leave again. Once Xiao Meng has indeed left, she immediately regrets having sent her away and tries unsuccessfully to find her in the neighbourhood. Half-insane, she returns home to a very puzzled husband.

The next day, a partial solar eclipse occurs. The I-narrator is particularly worried and decides to give Xiao Meng's parents a telephone call. However, the family she calls does not have a daughter called Xiao Meng. After returning home, she relates this to her husband, but he, too, reacts with surprise, claiming that there never was a Xiao Meng living with them. In the ensuing argument, he accuses her of being mentally disturbed.

⁵ This brief episode was deleted in *Today*, but is included in Yo Yo's Chinese anthology *Ta kanjian le liang ge yueliang* [She Saw Two Moons]. Compare *Today* 1995:4 (v. 31), p. 88 and *She Saw Two Moons*, Changchun: Contemporary Arts Publishing, 1995, pp. 25-6. Chen Maiping, then editor of *Today*, in an interview with the author (25 May 1995) acknowledged the cuts made in this story for reasons of length.

The narrator flees into the night, attempting to find the truth for herself and finally accepting the possibility that Xiao Meng might only have existed as a figment of her imagination. Eventually, she decides that Xiao Meng was part of a dream, quoting the early Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi, who once dreamt about a butterfly, but once he woke was unsure whether he was now the man who had just dreamt, or whether he was now a butterfly dreaming to be a man.

Set in contemporary Beijing, quite possibly at a time when the author herself was living abroad, the place itself does not give any clue towards an exile nature of the story. The themes in this story are existential. Tradition and modernity are questioned in conjunction with the question of age and ageing. The author does not oversimplify for the discourse on tradition and modernity by substituting 'eastern' and 'western' values respectively; instead she tries to explore the extremes of some positions from a moderate point of view. She tries to find an ideology for the age between youth and old age. Although Xiao Meng is a radical, even she is the product of compromise and tradition, and not just through the very act of rejecting these. Xiao Meng wants to be ideologically modern, rejecting the values of her parents as well as that of her older friend and wants instead to be a trendsetter for the youth generation. The I-narrator is caught between admiration and contempt.

To illustrate ideological differences, the author employs different linguistic styles for the protagonist's statements. Xiao Meng's way of speaking, *zhen mei jin* for 'no sweat', for instance, is mocked by the I-narrator.

The conflicts of the story are not antagonistic; instead the I-narrator looks for a synthetic solution, reflected in the usage of language. Conflict often gives way to confusion, which is expressed not only linguistically, but also by the narrator's (and her alter ego's) attitude towards sexuality, an underlying theme of the internal (and pseudo-external) monologues of the narrator.

Her own position, as a person in the middle, is shown by her age (at least, she feels middle-aged) and how she lives in the modern world without fully comprehending or adapting to it. Living in a conservative environment, she invents her ultra-modern alter ego to find some middle ground between these extremes. The poles of her world are represented in the personae of Xiao Meng and her husband.

These two figures are described in very different ways: while there are numerous descriptions of Xiao Meng's physical attributes, none at all are given for her husband. The only descriptions of him are of his behaviour and of his views. In a story where there is such emphasis on the language register of the main personas, it is striking that the husband remains nameless and nearly voiceless. This might show how alienated the narrator feels from patriarchal society: although occasionally she finds solace in his companionship, or at least comfort in its routine [p. 85], he is mostly portrayed as lacking understanding [pp. 81, 83] to an extent that she even thinks of him as a complete stranger [p. 86]. This depresses her as it leaves her feeling lonely. Their relationship is only ever harmonious when they are silent together [p. 88].

On a spiritual level, the three characters of the story can be divided into the godless Xiao Meng, the Daoist I-narrator.⁶ The narrator's tendency towards Daoism

⁶ References to Daoism can be found on pp. 90 and 97, the husband's approval of Confucianism on p. 88.

further shows her traditional character and also her naivete in coming to terms with the modern world. The I-narrator subscribes to a set of values which reflect both her upbringing influenced by communist propaganda as well as her naïve trust in traditional mores. She has a sense of responsibility towards society which is much criticised by Xiao Meng, who urges her to feel responsible for her own actions first and foremost. Here the narrative reflects (but does not comment) on a debate from the 1980s, the struggle to find a 'Self' after the sacrifice of 'Self' during the Cultural Revolution.⁷

The clash between modernity and tradition is shown in several examples. The conflict between Xiao Meng and narrator, as well as between Xiao Meng and her parents illustrate this. Xiao Meng demonstrates her modernity by wearing outrageous clothes [pp. 73-4, 78]. This is also an outward sign that she is sexually in charge [pp. 79, 85], unlike the narrator who is sexually passive and conservative in her fashion taste.

The narrator reflects on cultural differences:

"Beauty has no standard. Westerners prefer small noses and small mouths and a humble but pure appearance; they think that is the ideal Eastern beauty. So

⁷ See for instance Chen Maiping, "On the absence of the Self: from Modernism to Postmodernism?" in: Wendy Larson and Anne Wedell-Wedellsborg, *Inside Out: Modernism and Postmodernism in Chinese Literary Culture*, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1993, pp. 78-90. In the early 1990s, this debate spilled over into the Post-colonialism argument, based on Frederic Jameson's influence on a younger generation of Chinese literary critics, such as Chen Xiaoming. For an overview of the development of theoretical debates in China from the late 1970s to 1989 see: Anne Wedell-Wedellsborg, "From Mao to Derrida – Chinese literary criticism in the 80s" in: Ole Bruun et al. (eds.), *Modern China Research: Danish Experiences* Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 1991, pp. 88-99.

they set out deliberately to tan their skin olive-coloured – that is the travel colour – symbolising money and wealth, health and sex-appeal. Most Chinese people think that big eyes, a large nose and white skin constitute real beauty, and white skin in particular makes up for a lot of blemishes; these are certainly two very incompatible views of beauty.” [p.70]

The narrator concludes that beauty and happiness are very subjective. Some concepts of modernity, as explained mostly by Xiao Meng, may have been gained by first-hand experience of Western fashions. For instance, Xiao Meng lectures the narrator about dietary habits. She asks the narrator if she knows what “a happy egg” is, coining a phrase (*xingfu dan*), and tells her that this is an egg from a free-range chicken fed only food without chemical additives. It seems unlikely that organic food was of any concern or widespread knowledge even among the young and fashionable in Beijing in the mid-1990s.

Another daring concept is the re-defining of the institution of marriage. Xiao Meng coins another phrase, *shihun*, ‘trial marriage’, to describe co-habitation, a word from which the narrator recoils. [p.86]

The most negative reference to Western ways is made when the I-narrator is confronted with the evidence of Xiao Meng’s non-existence. Linguistically, this passage encapsulates the conflict of the story. To get her way, and possibly to frighten Xiao Meng’s supposed father, the narrator eventually adopts formal cadre speech and addresses him as ‘comrade’. Once she realises the futility of her attempts, she tries to regain her

composure: "like a fake foreign devil, shrugging one's shoulder, behaving as if nothing had happened." [p.95]

The conflicts between narrator and alter ego, between modernity and tradition and between Western and Eastern values, serve to highlight the fundamental question of the story, how to gain happiness? How to live a fulfilled life? The narrator's instinctive solution is to find solace in ancient ways, as illustrated by the Daoist references. Both Confucianism and Communism are rejected, as illustrated by the negative portrayal of husband and the conservative side of the narrator. The 'new' way of Xiao Meng and of the coming generation is also criticised. The solution the author proposes is to find a personal way, an amalgam of all the above. Happiness cannot be reached, it is a quest.⁸

This is not a subject matter with much appeal to a non-specialist Western audience; it seems rather to be geared primarily to an urban Chinese audience. The author assumes that the reader has a deep knowledge of China, in passages such as: "Is the 'Ah Q' spirit not part of the essence of our culture?" [p.73], "the upright years"⁹ as well as references to Xiao Meng's choice of songs [p.76], or to the pop star they both admire [p.

⁸ Here the late Wolfgang Bauer would agree, and find much in Yo Yo's definition of happiness which is distinctly Chinese as opposed to what he saw as a European approach. He described this in his seminal work *China and the Search for Happiness: recurring themes in four thousand years of Chinese cultural history*, trans. Michael Shaw, New York: Seabury Press, 1976. Original published as *China und die Hoffnung auf Glück: Paradiese, Utopien, Idealvorstellungen in der Geistesgeschichte Chinas*, Munich: Hanser [dtv], 1971 [1989]. According to Bauer, many of these differences are based on very early conceptualisations of happiness, see pages 29-33 of the original.

⁹ That is, older than 30 years [p. 88].

85]. However, there are also references which serve to show the author's experience of living abroad: Xiao Meng's tour leads her to all parts of China, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore and Germany. Xiao Meng's romantic ideal of sponsoring a struggling artist is compared to the European aristocracy of past centuries sponsoring artists such as Wagner and Rilke.¹⁰ The indecisiveness of the narrator with regard to the fundamental questions she asks is mirrored in this indecisive location. The exile's experience is further alluded to in the phrase:

'The outside world is very colourful
the outside world is very unavoidable' [p.91]

Is this the wistfulness of a person hankering after a lost youth, or the nostalgia of a person deracinated? There are childhood memories recalled: "Suddenly the first song I ever learned sprang to my mind", and a nursery rhyme is remembered as "this was the first song my mother sang to me". The narrator is concerned about her age ("How come I have aged so quickly") and shows the nostalgia associated with it: "Snowy days always have a sense of melancholy and nostalgia, and childhood memories emerge in front of one's inner eyes." [all quotes p. 72]

But there is a more pragmatic way of looking at the past displayed by Xiao Meng. She is annoyed by people feeling aggrieved and wronged by the events of the Cultural

¹⁰ The former lived first under the patronage of the Court of Saxony, before Ludwig II of Bavaria beckoned; the latter can hardly be described as having enjoyed aristocratic patronage, apart from a short spell at the castle of the Thurn and Taxis' family.

Revolution. "If everybody makes herself or himself out as a victim, who were the perpetrators?" she asks [p. 76].

Other themes are female sexuality and childbirth. The narrator is ambivalent and afraid. Would she be able to raise a child? Does she have the resources: "What if my child is a little Mozart and I cannot afford a piano?" [p. 71] Even worse, one could end up with an ungrateful child such as Xiao Meng. A child would also make leaving her husband even more difficult. In the end the narrator celebrates her non-pregnancy every month anew. This is, however, juxtaposed with a dream of her uterus in Elysian scenery, which happens to be a children's playground. [p. 82]

Although not wholly innocent, the narrator describes how she was still a virgin before meeting her husband-to-be. Marital sex is not described, although the fear of getting pregnant suggests it takes place. Nakedness is to be avoided and the narrator feels ashamed even to undress before her gynaecologist. The husband is doubly jealous: he does not want his wife to expose herself to another man, but he also suspects that her close friendship with Xiao Meng has lesbian undertones. The narrator does not reject this out of hand:

"Maybe we have some tendency towards this, I do sometimes, without realising, reach over with my hand to caress her tender face [...] but that is pretty much all there is to it." [p. 81]

The narrator sums up her opinion of sexual attitudes as follows:

“Women enjoy [on a spiritual level], men feel [on a physical level].” [p. 81]

The author's look at the changes in China's society is through the eyes of an insider, yet she shows signs of estrangement from that society: the reference to fashion sense gained from movie visits is slightly dated, as is the nod to literary criticism of the 1980s. The lack of involvement and first-hand experience might diminish the argument, as it is set in a contemporary time-frame, but on the other side, the distance the author has from her subject allows her to gain very different insights. The important part here is that being away, rather than the exile experience, which is reflected in her outsider/insider attitude. There is also a lack of references to contemporary politics: the politics the author discusses are those of the Cultural Revolution, and in more general terms those of the post-1979 period. There is no mention of the Tiananmen Massacre, for instance. This, therefore, is not so much a story by an exile, addressing an audience of fellow exiled dissenters, but that of a homesick expatriate, who wishes to be re-assimilated with the literary scene at home.

4.5. “She saw two moons”

Another story, “She saw two moons”,¹¹ completed in mid-1992, introduces a nameless woman who finds solace in solitude. The only person whose presence she can bear is that of her husband, whom she adores. He also remains nameless. She suffers from

¹¹ First published in *Wuyue* [May] 1994:2. Also included in the eponymous collection of Yo Yo's short stories: *She Saw Two Moons*, op. cit., pp. 175-201.

delusions, imagining for instance the conversation of two mosquitoes, and is prone to soliloquy.

The story is apparently set in Beijing in winter.¹² The protagonist tries to change her behaviour after a New Year's night party she attends without her husband. To her surprise, she enjoys the sexually charged atmosphere but she remains aloof, refusing all well-meant offers of joining in. She enjoys herself only as an observer, finding her cherished solitude even among the party throng. The next morning she travels through the snowy town by bus. Back home, she decides to become more outgoing. After a swimming session during which she felt she was being pursued, her husband discovers that her face has become half-black, half-white. Ensuing medical attention affirms that she suffers from a rare disease called 'Yijingitis'.¹³ The disease, so called because of the resemblance of her face to a Yin and Yang symbol, is incurable. At first, it makes her more outgoing and friendly to others. It also, somehow, increases her knowledge of foreign languages. But because of her disfigurement, her willingness to communicate is not reciprocated: it is not she who avoids society anymore, it is society which avoids her.

The disease leads next to hibernation-like sleep filled with sexual dreams. Afterwards, her sense of abandonment grows and her loneliness increases as her husband returns home less and less frequently. Her real name is by now forgotten in the neighbourhood, and instead she is called after her disease. She comes to be seen as the

¹² The only hint for the location can be found in a passage where the narrator has to flee an obnoxious palm-reader and decides to hide in a *hutong*, the traditional Beijing alleyway. See page 176: all page references for this story from *She Saw Two Moons*. It might, however, just be the habit of a person from Beijing to refer to alleyways in general, and here be applied to another city.

local devil. She flees her environment and hides in the forest, where she starts a cleansing bonfire. Falling asleep, she dies in the fire.

The setting, whether in China or not, does in any case not suggest the tale of someone living abroad. Yet the protagonist clearly lives in self-chosen inner exile, having withdrawn from society. There are a few pointers which lead one to draw a parallel with the author's pre-exile life in China, such as her mingling in artists' circles, although this is not to suggest that this story is meant to be autobiographical. The choice of a third-person voice indicates that any autobiographical references are hidden behind this wall of anonymity.

One can associate these sudden illnesses and the loss of voice involved with the sudden departure of the exile and the loss of native ability in the language spoken in the new environment. Alienation is pursued to a far greater extent, perhaps reflecting the much rawer experience of exile of the author at that stage. Homesickness is not yet ambiguous or even faintly pleasingly nostalgic: the loss of home is something to be afraid of. Her definition of home does not lack bitterness:

“[The sun] was tired, it had to go ‘home’ to rest (this is the narrow concept of humans, wrongly assuming that having a home is having everything, that it means being safe).” [p.182]

¹³ Possibly the author was influenced by her husband in coining this illness. Yang Lian was at the time composing his epic *Yi* (Taipei: Modern Poetry, 1994).

The loss of home leads to the tragic ending:

"She could not return to that home. She no longer had a home anymore."

[p.200]

The protagonist's frustration is the frustration of an exile. Newly arrived, she has no past in the new environment:

"She never talked about her past, as if she had been born as an adult. She had no past, only the present." [p.182]

Angrily, she even rejects the possibility of gaining a past: "[...] she had no right to have a memory." [p.182] The illness, however, opens new understanding:

"at first her body did not show any signs of anything being wrong. Turning on the radio, she could understand without the least effort the English news on short wave. [...] With a deep breath she turned to another frequency, French speaking. Again, she could understand everything. Excited, she turned the dial further: a German station, Italian, Greek, Spanish, even Icelandic, she could understand them all." [p.193]

Eventually, her understanding of foreign languages leads her to understand animals and plants as well. But apart from this surreal outcome, it must be every

emigrant's and exile's dream to fit into the new host country by perfectly understanding the language. Simultaneously, a linguistic ability is also a 'symptom' of living abroad.

The protagonist's disease makes her weird and she is seen by the neighbours as mad. But her madness begins much earlier than her disease. She finds comfort in her solitude and her power of imagination, both of which she experiences at best in darkness. When the darkness is taken from her (although only in her imagination: she sees two moons illuminating the night sky) by an unexplained power, she is agitated to the point of madness [p.183].

Other themes are comparisons with Western culture. Here the narrator is quite up-to-date with British events: the news she hears on the BBC news programme is of IRA soldiers mistakenly shooting Australian tourists, thinking they were British [p.193]. Another comparison is that of Western women's breasts: they are the "breasts the size of watermelons, sexy and enticing" [p.185] much to the chagrin of the narrator, whose own breasts she compares to pears.

The imagined world of the narrator, with its talking mosquitoes and two moons in the night sky, is described in terms which create a gloomy, surreal atmosphere. The impression wanted is Kafka-esque, and the narrator thinks of herself as "Kafka's ally." [p.180]

Although not explicitly about exile, this story has enough indicators to suggest that it reflects an exile's experience. The narrator tries to flee reality. The role of 'home' is ambiguous. Most tellingly, the fear of insanity and the obsession with language, in particular foreign languages, are typical of exiles.

4.6. "Casting anchor"¹⁴

This story opens (and ends) with a scene typical for any immigrant into a country with a different language from their own: the I-narrator sits in a language class, bored and frustrated by her inability to learn the language. Monotony leads her thoughts to wander, and she recalls numerous incidents which are juxtaposed with the present. She describes a number of acquaintances, from the arrogant writer based in an arrogant American city (presumably New York), to a gay friend called Xiao Er who introduces the narrator to some gay slang.

Illness is a recurrent motif in this story: the narrator herself is ill, resulting in her hiding from other people for a fortnight; illness is described as an important part of gay life (most likely an allusion to AIDS), and the story ends with the narrator's wistful observation: "These times are sick, too".

The story, dated 19 October 1994, was written during Yo Yo's stay in Stuttgart. The narrator's German classes and her inability to come to grips with the language are based on the author's life, hinting at the autobiographical nature of this story. The story features a frame narrative set abroad, in the present tense, and has vignettes recounting past events, all set abroad as well. The narrator does not suffer from any delusions about her whereabouts, nor does she complain overtly about her predicament, apart from her

¹⁴ Like the preceding story, this one was not published by *Today*. It was included in the collection *She Saw Two Moons*, op. cit., pp. 135-152. A German translation by Martina Kranz appeared in the Swiss literary magazine *entwürfe für literatur* [blueprint for literature] 1996:3, pp. 26-31. The story had been cut by more than two-thirds for publication, although it is not indicated whether this was done by author, translator or editor. Page references in the following are based on the Chinese publication.

boredom. The themes are sexuality, the role of women (here with the new angle in comparison to homosexuals), and foreigners and their habits.

Craziness is again a theme; here the narrator is not afraid of it but uses it to criticise sinologists. The story she retells is that of an old scholar who finally makes a discovery translating a classical text. For *feng*, “wind” (which here is meant to indicate an animal’s readiness to mate), he reads a different *feng*, to be mad. As this leads to a Freudian analysis of sexuality and madness, the narrator makes it seem an unnecessary discovery. [pp. 145-6]

The narrator has an eye in her stomach, an eye which constantly watches her and records whether her behaviour is conforming or not [p. 146]. This does not lead to paranoia but to an undisclosed feeling of sickness.

The title seems to indicate that the narrator has found her haven, on the assumption that ‘casting anchor’ has positive connotations for an exile as for a sailor. But the narrator would rather go away again before she becomes too stale. But the title *paomao* has a double meaning: it can also mean “to break down (in need of repair)”.

4.7. “The deaf” and “Days misspent”

“The deaf” is a very short story (about 1,200 characters), written in New England, finished on 23 February 1994. It is written in the form of a soliloquy. The premise is that the narrator has gone deaf, and her speech explores the consequences of her new state.

This short piece focuses nearly exclusively on the fear of losing one’s language. Purportedly looking at the loss from the opposite angle - the loss of hearing rather than speaking - its consequences entail the latter. The narrator wonders:

"Being deaf, doesn't that mean one has to be mute as well?" [p.209]

Combined with the fear of loss is the fear of insanity. The story opens with the line:

"The deaf person, who is locked into her room, will she not be going mad in her own world?" [p.208]

The narrator is depressed: she laments the state the world is in and the state in which she finds herself. Homesickness plays a part too. Despite her fear of being unable to think because she is too stupid or too mad, her brain still manages to recall lines from a popular Chinese song.

Salvation seemingly comes from an unlikely source: nearby church bells ring, and this is the only sound the narrator is able to hear. That her illness is only imagined can be deduced from the fact that in the snowy landscape outside all sounds are muffled, including that of her own voice. In reality, the church bells produce the only sound penetrating enough to reach the narrator's ear, but she is too far lost in self-indulgence and self-pity to accept a rational explanation. Instead she accepts her fate; the narrator finds solace in the aesthetics of her predicament and romantically declares:

"the most beautiful world is the one that cannot be heard, and cannot be seen." [p.209]

Here one can see an exile's negative experiences: the feeling of loss, the self-pity and the onset of depression. Yet much of the anguish is self-inflicted, some of the fears irrational and the losses non-existent.

"Days misspent" follows up these complaints, complementing the first story (which was written four days later) by looking at the more practical worries of exile life. "Days misspent" are the days the narrator spends in her new, foreign environment, days without any real work or task. The story describes in great detail the task of carrying a letter to the post office: this is the only kind of occupation the undervalued and unemployable exile has for the day, instead of being a manager at a corporation or such like. The soliloquy describes the day-to-day worries of the narrator and her fear of uselessness. The central metaphor is that of birds. All the birds in the narrator's new environment have flown south for the winter and the nests are empty. The only bird left behind is the crow, harbinger of doom. Yet the author reconciles herself with the thought that even a crow is a bird after all.

In a comparison similar to one made in "Faint", the narrator states "a bird's home is in the sky, men's home is on earth, your home is in your hand." [p.211] This echoes the narrator's feeling in "Faint":

"Home is what you can hold in your hands, like two suitcases; packed in five minutes you can hit the road, carrying 'home' to wherever." [*Today* 1993:2, p.37]

These two short pieces, written in quick succession, show the exile's plight from two different angles. There are the practical concerns and there are also other anxieties. These two monologues serve as a blueprint for many of the specifically exilic characteristic incorporated in Yo Yo's more detailed and developed stories and give pointers to the exile thematic.

4.8. Conclusion

The recurring themes and motifs in Yo Yo's work are mostly associated with her own experience of living abroad. The descriptions of pain and illness and the fear of them are linked with the fear of losing one's language as well as the loss of one's libido. Sexuality plays the most ambiguous role: some of Yo Yo's characters are non-sexual beings, others suppress their sexuality, yet others have fantasies of bisexual experiences. The feeling of loss is evident, but these losses all occur in the narrator's life and are only felt by her.

Most of the narrators' illnesses are of a psychosomatic nature, none more so than deafness in "The deaf". They are all caused by loneliness and a strong feeling of displacement. Homesickness and nostalgia are evident in the comparisons between China and the Western countries the protagonists visit or live in. The beauty of Chinese language is the one unchallenged superiority; habits and customs are often criticised regardless of their cultural origin. Memories, songs and dreams from the protagonists' childhood provoke nostalgic sentiment, while regrets from the past grow in the narrators' absence.

The most striking theme is the protagonists' self-centredness, their obsession with self, their own body, their own voice, and their own language. Although self-pity is mocked at times, it is so ubiquitous as to suggest a writer who has not been able to come to terms with a new and painful experience. The connection to the author's own angst, self-obsession and regard for language is documented in Yo Yo's article "Opening the door to inner silence".¹⁵

Yo Yo relies repeatedly on several techniques. Her stories are often fragmented, consisting of short episodes often only loosely connected by a frame narrative. In her shorter stories, she dispenses with the frame narrative altogether. There is often an I-narrator with strong autobiographical features. The fragmented nature of her stories lends itself to juxtapositions between present and past, where it is often not indicated in which timeframe the sub-stories are set. Comparisons and dreams are often linked to themes of cultural alienation and deracination.

There is little evidence of a specific exilic usage of terminology. Yo Yo has a predilection for slang and dialect words. In one story, "Faint", she even uses Chinese characters phonetically to convey the sound of the Gansu dialect.¹⁶ No Chinese term for 'exile' is used, although there is frequent use of the character *piao* for "to float". As will

¹⁵ In Wan Zhi (ed.), *Breaking the Barriers: Chinese Literature Facing the World – essays from a symposium for Chinese writers at Bommersvik, Sweden 1996*, Stockholm: Olof Palme International Centre, 1997, pp. 102-108.

¹⁶ In an article describing stories by Yo Yo, Liu Sola, Hong Ying and others, Zhang Zhen points out the subversive nature of using non-standard transcriptions of dialect words. See Zhang Zhen, "Jiqing yu mengyan de shijie ditu – xie zai guojia zhi wai de Zhongguo nü zuojia qunluo" [The global map of passions and nightmares: on a group of overseas Chinese woman writers], in: *Tendency* Autumn 1996, vol. 7-8, pp. 273-286, in particular pp. 276-7. She detects in Yo Yo's short story "a sense of loss" as well as an "unbearable lightness of being".

be discussed below, the term 'exile' is used when Yo Yo talks in a foreign language or to a foreign audience. In her contribution to the *Today* symposium in 1997, she used *fangzhu*, the weaker of the two possible Chinese terms to describe exile and *piaobo* as interchangeable.¹⁷ The only other prominent word is *feng*, crazy. This reflects the various narrators' concern about going mad, most often associated with their tendency to soliloquy. As such they can be attributed to the loneliness felt by the exile.

Most of Yo Yo's stories are autobiographical. In her first story, "Once there was a mountain", the protagonist is an oppressed woman, still living in China, caught in an abusive relationship. Even from a technical point of view, this woman does not possess a voice, the story is not told in the first person narrative but by an omniscient narrator. The second stage is represented by "Faint" and "Casting anchor". In these stories, the self-obsessed 'I' hankers after a past she knows will not come back, confusing the here and now with the there and then. The final stage sees the acceptance of exile status, such as in "Xiao Meng's Nirvana".

The causes for this development can be found in the writer's biography and in her audience. After leaving China for New Zealand, Yo Yo wrote articles, mostly concerned with her exile status, for Overseas Chinese magazines or for Taiwanese newspapers. At this stage, the possibility of publishing in China seemed remote. Yo Yo wanted to be recognised as a literary writer for stories such as "Once there was a mountain", first published in Hong Kong. In Europe it proved even more difficult to find a local audience: translations were scarce and of varying quality, and there was (and still is) only a very

¹⁷ Youyou, "Kai xiang neixin chenmo de men" in Wan Zhi (ed.), op. cit., pp. 89-91, 94. The latter page reference refers to the use of *fangzhu*.

limited market for contemporary Chinese literature. The expectations of European journalists and editors seemed to be that Yo Yo suffered persecution in China and had fled into exile with her husband. In an interview with the *Berliner Zeitung*, she stated that she was writing mostly about the feelings of a Chinese woman in a foreign world, and that she had long lost any sense of home¹⁸. The article is riddled with inaccuracies, either because of communication problems with the interviewer (the interview was conducted in English), or because Yo Yo wanted to be seen as an exile at least by non-Chinese readers. Among other things, she is described as having left China 'after the bloodbath at Tiananmen.' In another article, better researched and of more depth, she is again described as an exile, but here it is added correctly that the Tiananmen Massacre changed her life only in as far as she could not return to China together with her husband¹⁹. The article quotes Yo Yo on her exile status: "I only knew about exile from books but suddenly it was my reality. That was a very painful experience."²⁰ Of her own exile writing she says: "In 1990 I started writing in Chinese, which was suicidal, as no-one in the West would publish me or had ever even heard of me. But I had to write, about my experience of living in all these different countries. It was secondary who would read

¹⁸ Dietgard Tomczak, " 'Ich habe kein Heimatgefühl mehr': Die chinesische Exilschriftstellerin Yo Yo ist drei Monate lang zu Gast im Künstlerschloss Wiepersdorf" ('I have no sense of home anymore': the Chinese exile writer Yo Yo is guest for three months at the artists' commune at Castle Wiepersdorf), in: *Berliner Zeitung*, 15 July 1997.

¹⁹ Katrin Schoelkopf, "Vom Leben und Schreiben in der Einsamkeit des Exils" [About life and writing in the loneliness of exile], in: *Berliner Morgenpost*, 22 July 1997, p.13.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

me.”²¹ This is writing as an exercise to come to terms with the sudden acquisition of the exile status, which is supported by the literary analysis above.

Yo Yo continues: “Now I am able to live everywhere”, even going as far as asserting that she does not suffer from homesickness anymore.²² More importantly, she has come to the realisation (and is paraphrased to that effect) to which every exile will come after enough time has passed: the country of one’s origin will have changed sufficiently for the returnee to become a foreigner in his or her own country.

In another example, on 26 March 1999, she participated during the London Festival for Literature in a reading organised by PEN International and billed as “Dissident Voices”. The event included Bosnian, Turkish, Romany, Montenegrin and Lebanese writers, all of whom stated that they had left their countries because of war or persecution. Yo Yo, in contrast, stated that she was not even much of a dissident.

Before her exile, Yo Yo was unknown as a writer or as a personality, and this hampered her literary career from the start, although her marriage to Yang Lian certainly opened doors: Amman, Yang Lian’s Swiss publisher, considered publication of a collection of her short stories. Rather than blaming bad translations or her own shortcomings for her failure to establish a name, Yo Yo assumed that her subject matter and style were too ambitious or not conventional enough to conform to the expectations of a market stimulated by works such as *Wild Swans*. She then attempted to reach this

²¹ Ibid. There are some contradictions in Yo Yo’s statements about her first publication. In her curriculum vitae she states that she started writing once she had moved abroad. In an interview with the author, she said she started writing “Once there was a mountain” in 1988, confirming the first statement. Unusually, however, the publication of that story in *Today* has no date for the story. A date is given in *She Saw Two Moons*: June 1986, see page 219.

market with an autobiographical novel based on her family, to be published simultaneously in Great Britain and in China. Political censorship and commercial pressures compete in the publishing world of China, and Yo Yo seems prepared to accept certain conditions in order to be published.²³ Following the description from Yang Lian in his diary for *Index on Censorship*, censorship politically motivated but applied through market forces plays a role too. Yang Lian left it open as to how Yo Yo will react to any attempts of censorship, although he hints at the economic necessity to accept certain conditions in order to be published.²⁴ In this case, being unknown proved to be a bonus, as Yo Yo said in an interview with the *Berliner Morgenpost*: "I was not known in the public like my husband was, and no-one knew who I was when I used my nom-de-plume. Also the opening of China towards Western markets facilitated publication."²⁵ The success of Yo Yo's publications in China makes it difficult to define her as a true exile writer. Because of her marriage with Yang Lian she has been an exile, if only an exile by association, during the last ten years. She suffered an exile's punishment but also enjoyed benefits impossible to obtain for a true exile: family visits and publication at home. It is not surprising then that Yo Yo is quick to disassociate herself from the notion of exile, even though her work shows many signs of exile writing. She is certainly not a travel

²² Ibid.

²³ See Yang Lian's diary of a visit to China in December 1999/January 2000, published as "Return to Beijing" in *New Left Review*, vol. 4, July/August 2000, pp. 37-48 and as "Leaving the 20th Century" in *Index on Censorship*, vol.3, 2000, pp. 186 -94.

²⁴ On the question of censorship, Jung Chang refused to succumb to any attempts to make cuts to her best-seller which in the Chinese translation by her brother Zhang Pu, titled *Hong*, proved to be a big success in other Chinese markets. For this reason, according to Jung Chang herself, as a result, *Hong* was never published in Mainland China (Public lecture, London, 13 February 1994).

²⁵ Schoelkopf, "Vom Leben und Schreiben" in *Berliner Morgenpost*, 22 July 1997, p.13.

writer on a tour of Western countries, and despite working in academic institutions has shown little inclination to contribute directly to academic debates. In order to be published in China, she accepted the label of "Overseas Student Writer", as the cover note of *She Saw Two Moons* described her. It also placed her in Australia long after she moved to Europe. The label is inaccurate: she has not been enrolled at a university.

Yo Yo's writing takes place on several levels. Some of her stories have strong exile undertones, some are experimental stories, where a straightforward interpretation is less possible and her most recent work suggests that she is willing to adapt to a Western market. In itself, this, too, is a typical exile reaction: financial crises, with the absence of a network of friends and family, are felt much more keenly and need to be redressed with more resolve.

5. Liu Sola's Stories

5.1. *Chaos And All That*

The novel *Chaos And All That* was one of the first (and still one of very few) full-length novels written (and published) by an exiled Chinese writer.¹ It describes the life of a young Chinese woman called Huang Haha, who lives in London. Interwoven in her tale (related by an omniscient narrator) are Haha's attempts to write her autobiography: first-person accounts of Haha's youth in China, chronicling her early admiration for the Red Guards and her attempts to join them. In 1966 she was eleven and thus the same as the author at the time; furthermore, the protagonist comes from and has to suffer because of her class background, the same as the author. These resemblances suggests that the passages are based on the author's own experience. There are further autobiographical elements: for instance, Haha living in London.

The protagonist is in an on-again, off-again relationship with a Western man called Michael, who is drawn to her by her exotic allure. Her best friend is Lao Gu, a man she knew when both of them were living in Mainland China. Both frequently discuss their attitudes towards sex, relationships and promiscuity. Marriage is another of Haha's concerns, having been married at an early age and immediately afterwards divorced, "to

¹ Originally published under the title *Hundun jia li ge leng* [Muddled plus la-dee-da], Hongkong: Tupou, 1991. The novel was panned by a specialist critic, Trevor Carolan, in *Modern Chinese Literature* 1994:8, who found that "in spite of its naif charm, [...] Liu Suola veers unhealthily close to winning a dream date with Woody Allen with this book." ["The arrival of 'Fiction from Modern China'", p. 235]. Kam Louie, in the same issue of *Modern Chinese Literature*, finds similar faults with Liu's earlier work, branding it pretentious and self-indulgent ["The translatability of Chinese culture", p. 219]. Carolan recognises the potential of Liu's marketability, although not among a mainstream audience. This is supported by the selective clippings in Liu's self-promotional webpage.

get it over and done with" [p.74], but at the end of the novel it is her mother back in China who gets re-married in an arranged match. The closure of the book sees the protagonist recalling her life through song and verse through the different periods from Maoist propaganda to Canto-pop, and her present situation is summarised through letters from her friends and family.

The main themes of the story are homesickness and associated with it comparisons between China and the West. The protagonist is suffering from homesickness. Constantly she compares her new home with her old, not to the benefit of the former. Homesickness shows itself in food-related matters: English baked beans are "indigestible" [p.55] and she and her Chinese friends, who only eat out in Chinese restaurants, hanker after real Chinese food. They wonder why English cuisine is so particularly bad and see it as a reflection on its civilisation's backwardness. [pp. 55-57]

Haha's biggest problem is that she sees herself as a symbol of Chinese culture and civilisation; in fact, she thinks she alone represents her country:

"Particularly since her arrival in London she had felt, as she walked the streets clogged with dog shit, that she had suddenly become an example of a Chinese cultural heritage, stretching from Confucius to patent herbal hair restorers, that was both alien to the world in which she now found herself and incompatible with it. [pp.46-47]²

² Quotes from *Blue Sky Green Sea and other stories*, Hong Kong: Renditions, 1993.

She experiences some very mild form of racism. When Haha's postman sees her standing motionless in the middle of the street, he mutters under his breath, still audible to Haha, "funny people, these Asians." [p.74]

She suspects that her boyfriend is only attracted to her because of her Chinese origin:

"Now that Michael was over the thrall of her exoticism and inscrutability, he had taken to finding fault with her." [p.47]

Michael represents the attitude of her host country, first amused, entertained and intrigued, but then rejecting her. Haha is very sensitive to any form of distancing, interpreting it as well as any other mishap in social life as rejection. Her reaction is to look down on the host culture in favour of China:

"Her landlord went travelling, as did many of her fellow students. On one occasion Haha had applied for a visa to go to Italy, but she had been turned down as soon as the official had seen her Chinese passport. She tried not to take this kind of thing to heart. When it happened, she merely told herself, I've been all around China, and there's more of China than there is of the whole of Europe."
[pp.47-48]

But she is well aware that the same kind of people exist both at home and abroad:

"Haha sat by the window looking out at the street. The leisured ladies of London were taking the air, their complacent faces redolent with the pomp and grandeur of British culture. This took her back to the streets of her childhood, to the revolutionary grannies of Peking who seemed to find themselves and their society more radiant than the sun." [p.10]

The author is sufficiently worried at having created a bad impression, or having let her penchant for describing the ugly side of things go too far, to add a disclaimer in form of an afterword to the English edition:

"Forget about the distance between China and the rest of the world. Please don't get upset with the book and ask me if it's true that the Chinese kill cats and insult each other. And don't ask me if this is the story of my life.

I can tell you this: the Chinese kill everything, just the same as you do. Cursing and insulting each other in all sorts of different ways is part of the Chinese civilization. [...]" [p.127]

The disappointment works both ways for the characters in the novel. Her left-wing friend Alex goes to China and is disappointed:

" 'So what did you expect to find there?' she [Haha] asked him. 'The revolution. Socialism. And all that I found was materialism.' [p.49]

But one metaphor the narrator chooses herself in her memories of China is human excrement. [pp. 51-54]

The descriptions of the Cultural Revolution are both brutal and tender. The protagonist's life is described during this time and contrasted with the present in London, where she has matured and although not prone to self-pity still nostalgic for even the less pleasing aspects of the past. She punctures the myth of her generation as victims and goes even further by implying that the heroics of a previous decade were enhanced by myth, too. "Pretty cushy revolution, Mummy," Haha mocks her mother, who enjoyed a privileged existence thanks to a brother who was a successful general in the army. [p. 67]

This story is not written with a Western audience exclusively in mind. There are too many references to Chinese culture which are left unexplained for a non-specialist reader. For instance, there are comparisons with the Qing dynasty novel *Story of the Stone* [pp. 68-70], or the use of the Chinese euphemism "clouds and rain" to allude to the sexual act [p.62]. But Liu Sola's novel differs in several points from autobiographical best-sellers from China by Jung Chang, Nien Cheng and Min Anchee. Firstly, although the narrator shares some features with the author, this is not an avowedly autobiographical work. Secondly, experiences in China are contrasted with life abroad, while in the works of the above mentioned authors the arrival in the West represents the climax of their novels. Thirdly, there is no glorification of the past, detailed description of suffering due to political persecution and no deliberate attempt to provoke sympathy for

its victims. Finally, Liu does not set out to explain comprehensively certain historical periods in China's recent history; indeed, it is left unclear what is fact and what is fiction.

5.2. "Men piling on men"

In the early 1990's, Liu Sola published two short stories in *Today*, "Yidianyuan zhi meng [A Dream of the Garden of Eden]"³ and "Ren dui ren [Men piling on men]"⁴. The latter story was written, according to the dates given in *Today*, in April and May 1990 in London and Oslo.

"Men piling on men" is set in London. The I-narrator lives in a flat in the city centre. She is living in a run-down housing estate with neighbours from all over the world. She does not make any effort to get to know them, preferring to stay indoors and suffer in silence. Her doctor attests that she is suffering from a psychological anomaly based on hatred, a misomania. A neighbour interrupts her isolation by constantly playing one record, a song titled "My postcard". Enraged, the narrator looks for help from other neighbours and thus meets first a couple, also from mainland China, and later an American playwright and a succession of his girlfriends. He persuades the narrator to collaborate in writing a play, and she starts writing an outline, titled "Hate". The outline describes a Chinese village, a model for good behaviour, which is destroyed by the bad

³ *Today* 1992:3 (v. 18), pp. 45-48.

⁴ *Today* 1990:1 (v. 10), pp. 19-25. Parts of the story were translated by Jenny Putin and Wu Daming under the title "The People Pile" in: Jessie Lim and Li Yan (eds.), *Another Province: new Chinese writing from London - Tianwai you tian: Lundun Huaren xin xiezu xuan*, London: Lambeth Chinese Community Association, 1994, pp. 41-47.

influence of outsiders and foreigners, whose bad habits are catching on in the “good” village.

After writing the first part of this outline, the narrator discovers that the neighbour's music has stopped. Suddenly, months later, the same record starts blaring out again. She immediately walks over to the neighbour's flat in order to complain. To her surprise, a boy opens the door and explains that he had recently moved in and just happened to find the old record and wanted to hear it. It transpires that the neighbour had written the song, which had enjoyed great success in his home country, but had played it so often in London that he had gone mad.

The narrator then finishes her outline but cannot make it compatible with the American's ideas. Instead, she loses patience and presents the script to a British director who accepts it after some changes.

“Men piling on men” is typical of narratives by displaced authors in being set in the author's country of residence (rather than origin) and focuses on encounters with non-Chinese. To contrast the exoticism of the west, the author arranges for the narrator to meet with other Chinese resident abroad. But it soon becomes apparent that the “weirdness” she laments is in fact a shared characteristic of her own, not of the host country. All the main players in the story are of original from countries other than their current residence: the playwright is American, his latest girlfriend is Russian and one set of neighbours are Chinese; even the annoying neighbour speaks with a foreign accent.

The comparison between past and present is mirrored by the use of two different fonts: a contemporary font is used for the story which is set in contemporary Britain,

while the outline, which is set in a Chinese environment on the brink of modernity, is printed in the ancient style of *li shu*, “official script”.⁵

In the present, people have bad manners, yet in the outline of the play, tradition forces children to behave properly and swear words are not used in public, a state the narrator finds laudable.

She even longs for Communist authority whenever she is annoyed by the surfeit of Western freedom, which she defines in extreme terms as the freedom to do whatever one wants. Confronted with her neighbour’s record-playing, she recalls, half-fondly, half-ironically, that the Street Activist Committee would never have allowed such a disturbing behaviour. [p.19]

The strong link to home is signified by the narrator’s memories and dreams. She recalls the past especially when she is confronted by concepts she disagrees with. Her sense of disappointment is expressed in the unfavourable comparison between now and a past which the narrator had thought was terrible but now reconsiders: “I would never have thought that [this was possible] in Europe.” [p.19] The time she had not “thought of it” was after graduating from her high-school, expecting a peaceful life in China.

Although the narrator is absorbed in her own small world, she frequently mentions world affairs and Chinese affairs in particular.

The time frame of the story is several months, maybe a year, and possibly during 1989, although the only hint for this assumption is a reference to the Chinese people’s

⁵ One should be careful of over-interpretation here: it is after all quite possible that the editors of *Today* choose the font to highlight the outline.

oppression. She cannot return under such circumstances. The Chinese are to be pitied (as is the narrator), and the images of contemporary China do not lend themselves to nostalgic feelings. China's past is seen differently. Looking for reasons for China's miserable state, the narrator comes up with the ready answer based on her own experience of living abroad: foreigners are to blame. Home exists in a golden past. When the narrator of the outline was young, her birthplace was famous throughout China for its residents' politeness [p.21]: nobody swears, spits or betrays a lack of manners in other ways. The past, and by extension pre-Cultural Revolution China, is perfect. This ideal is threatened when a tourist from a foreign place (*waidi*) comes visiting. He swears in public in the local dialect, much to the consternation of the locals. Other tourists follow, and gradually the whole town is corrupted and bad habits prevail.

The song "My postcard" is compared to the Chinese national anthem, which is described as almost unbearably irritating. The narrator concludes that Western-style music is even louder and more disturbing than old-fashioned patriotic Chinese music.

The narrator's main contacts are with the Chinese couple, especially with the wife who comes from the same town, and the American. Her communication with the latter is straightforward and rather one-sided. He talks about his plans at a fast pace. After their first meeting, the narrator sits down and starts writing the outline for "Hate". The opposite is the case with the Chinese couple. For instance, at her first visit, the narrator is in the beginning completely ignored. Later she talks to the wife about their hometown, a nostalgia more bitter than sweet: "She [the wife] surely is ill, too. I know the history of my town." [p.20] Nevertheless, it is comforting to be with someone of the same origins. These juxtapositions and comparisons are not just stylistic but can also be seen as

conceptual. Another important theme in this story is patriotism. This patriotism is not an ugly nationalism, motivated by racial hatred. The author is ironic, and the comparisons are not of the nature of "Which is better?" but of "Which is less bad?"

The narrator cannot come to terms with the constant changes in the American's ideals, relationships and goals. His striving to perfect the virtues of "internationalism" and "anti-patriotism" is portrayed as a ridiculous exercise. Since the American is feeling more or less integrated in his environment, it also shows the narrator's refusal to assimilate.

The American has an interesting and rewarding job: he is a playwright, full of ideas and activism. In contrast, the Chinese woman has a bad and monotonous job, painting eyes on eggs. Their creative talents are channelled in different directions: the Chinese woman's creativity is dulled by the monotony of her work, but the American's is unfulfilled through too much freedom.

The Chinese couple's relationship is strained since she knows that her husband is cheating on her. Nevertheless, she vows to fight to keep him, and later the emotional balance in her life is re-established. The American has a string of relationships choosing his girlfriends for entirely selfish reasons.

To summarise, it can be said that the Chinese wife has a stable life. She suffers but is never desperate and is determined to survive. The American in the end achieves nothing at all. Thus the author evokes sympathy, perhaps based on pity, for the Chinese wife. There is, on the other hand, little sympathy for the American, despite his bohemian way of life.

The narrator is positioned in between these two extremes: she is a playwright but she is also Chinese. She is not in a relationship and is indeed happy to be alone. Unlike the American, she is nostalgic. He is in denial of his status, claiming "internationality". The Chinese wife is happy to talk about her home town, but her pragmatism is dominant and she does not allow herself to indulge in nostalgia. Yet her yearning for continuity is exacerbated by the alien environment, which she consciously shuts out of her life – even the shopping is done by her husband.

The composer, the Russian starlet and the narrator all suffer in exile. The starlet threatens to commit suicide. The composer's extreme nostalgia leads to his collapse. The narrator is in danger of a similar fate. Having left a suffocating environment in China she comes to an even less acceptable place in the West. She has already developed a mental illness, which isolates her completely. A change takes place when she becomes active, channelling her depression into aggression. Her aggression brings her finally to express herself artistically in the outline of her play: exile becomes the momentum for her creative drive.

5.3. "A dream of the Garden of Eden"

This is an account of a dream. In her dream, the I-narrator applies for a job in the Garden of Eden but is incensed to find out she has been assigned to Adam's concubine office. Confronting Adam, she demands a transfer, which astonishes him, as he thinks he is the seed of emotion in the world. The I-narrator disagrees, saying that it is 'finger' (*zhi*). Adam challenges her to find 'finger', and with the promise that she can keep it should she do so, she embarks on a tour of the Garden of Eden to find it. This brings her

to encounters with dream-like creatures, among others the siren-like sisters from the Chinese province Anhui, before she encounters 'finger', is chased away and hurts herself. Her mother intervenes, takes her to Adam's office and demands compensation for her daughter's injuries. After some debate, Adam kicks her out of his office and out of her dream. The narrator awakes: 'finger' is watching her.

The story shows all the characteristics of a dream: the laws of physics are abolished, the plot jumps aimlessly, the action is random and the characters are from the realm of fantasy. The text allows any number of interpretations, or rather defies any authoritative interpretation. Starting from the main characters, one is tempted to see the dispute between the female I-narrator and Adam as a conflict between woman and man. His arrogance marks him out: he tells the narrator that he is at the centre of all things, and the justification of male supremacy is women's need for men. The I-narrator disagrees: her preference for 'finger' is possibly a reference to masturbation. This would also fit in with the suggestive remarks by 'finger', "if you dare [me] anymore, I shall possess you." [p.47 + p.48]

The images in the dream are a melange of pictures from different cultures. Significantly, the central image of the Garden of Eden and Adam are taken from Western religion, but she also dreams of black, white and yellow-skinned faces [p.46], as well as the sisters from Anhui.

The Garden of Eden is, in Judaeo-Christianity, man's first home, and its inhabitants become the first exiles. The dream can be interpreted as a search for the pre-

exilic existence, disappointment with it, an attempt to leave, and finally forced expulsion caused by an injustice.

5.4. Conclusion

Liu Sola's stories all deal with her situation as an exile. Her exile seems not to be motivated by political reasons but by artistic reasons, so that she could pursue a musical career with greater freedom. In a round-table talk conducted by Zha Jianying, Liu claimed that she was not a professional writer and that she had not followed literary developments in the Mainland for the last decade.⁶

The main theme in her work is comparison: between past and present, and between life in China and life in the West. The most frequent occurring motifs are dreams, childhood memories, fear of loss and madness.

The pre-eminence of dreams in her work, linked with memories and yearnings for the past, are at odds with her self-promotion as a ground-breaking musician as well as a proponent of pop-lit. Lexically, Liu's work shows a high rate of occurrences of such words as 'remember', 'think back to', 'recall', etc. Her characters are always drawing comparisons along the lines of nationality: here the Chinese, there the Westerners. Nostalgia is expressed for not only the time when she lived in China, but even for a China pre-dating herself, an even more idealised, cultured country. Possibly it is in literature that

⁶ Transnational China Project, "Informal Roundtable Discussion by Three Authors: Wang Meng, Liu Sola, Zha Jianying" (translated by Marshall McArthur), Baker Institute, Rice University, March 10, 1998. See <http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~tnchina/commentary/round0398.html>.

This statement is also at odds with her past as writer in residence, for instance.

Liu can find the outlet to express her frustrations of exile and homesickness, and where she can come to terms with her own cultural roots.

The ambiguity of Chinese tradition, which was also evident in the I-narrator's stance in Yo Yo's "Xiao Meng's nirvana", is the replacement of traditional values, branded 'bourgeois' and 'feudal' by the Communist Party with a set of revolutionary values which quickly became ossified and then constituted what it thought to replace. The qualities of 'goodness' as evinced by Yo Yo's narrator, a melange of altruism, self-sacrifice and a pathological sense of responsibility, are thus plausibly grounded in the unlikely alliance of Daoism and 1950s and 1960s communist orthodoxy.

Her encounter with the Chinese couple re-enforces her sense of loss. Aware of the short-comings of home she is simultaneously disappointed by the shallow freedom of the host country.

Only her childhood is safe from criticism and re-evaluation. Childhood memories also come to the narrator in her dreams. Dreams are frequently mentioned, but the only one described is "a dream where I was eating peanuts together with my mum" [p.20]. Eating in company and memories of food were also favourite past-times of Haha, the narrator of the *Chaos And All That*.

Fear of madness makes another appearance; here it is not the narrator who goes mad but her neighbour. He, too, is an exile, and his suffering is caused by memories from home.

6. Duoduo's stories

From the beginning of the re-launched *Today*, Duoduo regularly contributed poems and short stories. There is considerable debate as to what degree or whether at all Duoduo's poetry is of a political nature, exploiting of his status as an exile, or whether it has been interpreted by others as political. This debate will be dealt with after the analysis of Duoduo's prose work.

Between early 1990 and late 1992, Duoduo wrote six short stories which were published in *Today* between 1990 and 1993. For more than two years, Duoduo did not publish further stories in *Today*. In this sense, they form a closed series.

These stories are all set abroad: "Hitch-hiking [Da che]"¹ is set in England and Scotland, "Tattoo [Wenshen]"² in an unspecified desert zone in New Mexico, "Vacation [Dujia]"³ in Canada, "Going Home [Hui jia]"⁴ in England, "Meadows [Caoping]"⁵ again in Canada and "The Hotel [Lüguan]"⁶ in France.

¹ *Today* 1990:2 (v.11), pp. 1-5. Translated by Harriet Evans in: Zhao and Cayley, *Undersky Underground*, pp. 211-218. I follow Evans's translation of the title, *Today* gives "Getting a lift".

² *Today* 1991:2 (v. 13), pp. 55-59. Translated by Harriet Evans and John Cayley in: Zhao and Cayley, *Undersky Underground*, pp. 201-210.

³ *Today* 1992:1 (v.16), pp. 46-55. Translated by John Crespi in: Zhao and Cayley, *Abandoned Wine*, pp. 271-282.

⁴ *Today* 1992:2 (v.17), pp. 211-222. Translated by Harriet Evans in: Zhao and Cayley, *Abandoned Wine*, pp. 257-270.

⁵ *Today* 1992:3 (v.18), pp. 62-73.

⁶ *Today* 1993:1 (v.20), pp. 53-62.

6.1. "Hitchhiking"

"Hitchhiking" is the first of Duoduo's short stories to be published in *Today*, dated 27 September 1990. It is also the first short story Duoduo composed while living abroad.

The protagonist and I-narrator, as in so many of Duoduo's stories, is a Chinese man called Li. This name is nearly homophone with the author's real name, but written with a different character, pointing towards the autobiographical nature of the stories and at the same time maintaining a difference between the protagonist's and author's experiences. On Christmas Eve, Li tries to hitch a lift from London to Scotland to meet a friend called Xiao Feng. Summoned the night before by a desperate phone call from Xiao Feng, he does not hesitate for long before undertaking the journey, as he is already feeling lonely in the deserted student dormitory. Having started early in the morning, he reaches York by midday. His luck takes a turn for the worse as a police officer admonishes him for trying to hitchhike near a petrol station, and he is taken by the police officer closer to where he started from. Undeterred, Li lines up at the next petrol station, where after a lengthy wait he is finally accepted by the driver of a truck carrying bales of straw. On the front seat beside the driver are his son and his dog. Li has to settle in the back amid the bales. He soon discovers that there are other passengers in the back, two tall, blond girls who seem to be engaged in some sexual activity. While Li is dozing, his mind wanders. After he has fallen asleep, he is woken by one of the girls, who is stroking his face. After a while she becomes bolder and kisses him. Finally, the truck stops and the girls get off. Only now does Li realise that the two girls were in fact young men with long blond hair. At least, he has arrived in Scotland now.

In part, the story reads as a Christmas story: Li witnesses a couple which has to bed down on hay, given shelter by a merciful truck-driver. The boy and his dog in the front of the truck might symbolise a (modern) shepherd. The story takes place on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. But: no-one is about to give birth, and the couple is not even of mixed sex. A large part of the other imagery usually associated with the Christmas story is also absent. It is hence a confusion of stories, the associated confusion of the protagonist undergoing this process is the main theme of the story.

The confusion of sexuality can be seen as a metaphor for the process of assimilation into a new culture, in which the author was involved at the time. Li is stroked while his eyes are covered by the other person: his blindness illustrates the blindness he feels in this country, yet at the same time he fears that the hand is there so that the other person does not want to see his (Chinese) face. He is also anxious and aware of being different. In his English language class in London, he says, the (foreign) students sit neatly separated in different columns according to their hair colour. There are foreigners, and there are people like him who are even more foreign.

His desire to blend in, or at least the anxiety not to stick out, is expressed in the warmth of his description of what he thinks is a typical Christian Christmas, where he admires the religious aspects as well as the festive activities. Musing why the driver of the lorry was spending his Christmas on the road, he speculates:

“Maybe his wife had left him, leaving him behind with only their son and dog, but maybe it is just the opposite, they are on the way back to her. Whichever it was, I hoped he could return to a house with a warm fireplace, and, like all people who believe in Jesus, that he could come together with his family tonight, the man opening the champagne, the woman carrying in the

roast, the children saying grace, and the dog the last to fall asleep. I really didn't wish for anyone in this world to be alone on a night like this." [p.2]

This passage shows the cultural shock Duoduo's. He evokes an idealised picture of a foreign culture, with defined gender and age roles that would have been more usual at an earlier time. Such an unreflecting description, absent in his later work, shows a willingness to accept customs in his new country and even a certain satisfaction in their existence. It also shows that Duoduo has just arrived, and does not yet quite know the details of such customary events: champagne is only rarely drunk in Britain before dinner, and the Christmas roast is usually eaten at lunchtime on Christmas Day. The fireplace, however, is a classic symbol for home and safety: things the narrator lacks but is happy to see others enjoy.

In a further embrace of his host country's culture, he optimistically expects some kind of salvation in the melancholy, rural setting:

"The last pale light of an English winter day was already disappearing and church bells were ringing from nowhere, asserting an urgent message: whatever you believe in will eventually arrive." [p.2]

The overriding emotion of the narrator is that of loneliness. The pity he shows for his friend Xiao Feng is based on the understanding of a shared sentiment, even though he chides her for not being able to integrate more successfully in her Scottish environment. But he too feels lonely, in particular during the holidays when he finds himself "like a ghost wandering about the hallways" [p.1]. In the lorry, his loneliness turns into a lack of self-confidence and into a sense of otherness, as he immediately

assumes that the embrace he enjoys is a mistake by one of the 'girls' who is looking for the other person in the back of the lorry. He feels anxious that his different-looking face is off-putting to a British girl.

Cultural misunderstanding is also evident when Li is picked up by "very young, very friendly" [p.1] policeman. He turns out to be of no help at all, indeed the opposite as he takes Li further away from his destination and lectures Li on trying illegally to get a lift. Li, who knew nothing about the law he had broken was also confused when the policeman's attitude towards him changed.

Li's status in Britain is not described. It is not clear whether he is there as a student, a writer, an exile or an immigrant. His identity seems to be defined chiefly by his nationality, even overriding his sexuality: he feels no sexual arousal when looking at the bare legs of English girls in London (though he does care enough to notice that they are "perfectly formed" [p.4]). Instead he feels more attracted to lifeless mannequins or the graveyard statue of a naked woman. His embrace of the 'girl' is at first platonic, he seeks the warmth of human contact, and is taken by surprise when this contact becomes more physical and sexually charged. Then the passage abruptly stops, failing to reveal how much further the embrace went.

It is fitting that Li's encounter with what turned out to be a man further confuses his sexuality. The story is written from the point of view of a heterosexual man, indeed the punch line would be lost if the reader would fail to assume that any such embrace had to be of a heterosexual nature. But Li does not react with much surprise or even revulsion after the revelation. He only feels deflated and disappointed that the excitement he felt on Christmas Eve could not be carried forward to Christmas Day.

The lorry driver also identifies him by his nationality: one of the first questions he asks is "Are you Chinese?" [p. 2], and his farewell wish is: "Happy Christmas, Chinaman" [p.5]

In summary, the narrator of this story addresses an audience of fellow exiles finding themselves in similar predicaments in a foreign culture. Nothing is as it seems to be, but the outcome of any possible misunderstanding is, though random, never harmful.

6.2. "Going Home"⁷

The story is set in the north of England, in a town called Ai'ermeng, described as being located seventy miles north of Scarborough.⁸ As his translators will have found out, there is no such place similar sounding in all of England, never mind north of Scarborough, where there is in any case only the Northern Sea. This may sound like unnecessary nit-picking, but it has to be stated that in most of his prose work, Duoduo does not seem to be overly concerned with slight inaccuracies and inconsistencies.

The protagonist and first-person narrator is Li. "Going Home" is set during two days of his life: Easter Sunday and Easter Monday, which is also April's Fool Day, April 1.⁹

⁷ The following page numbers refer to the original version as printed in *Today* 1992:2. The translations, as for all following stories, are mine, unless otherwise stated. Harriet Evans' translation in *Abandoned Wine* is often not literal enough to allow textual analysis.

⁸ Harriet Evans settled for Wearmouth, which actually exists and Michel Hockx offers Ayremond (Duoduo, "Terug naar huis", translated by Michel Hockx, in: Duoduo: *Tatoeages* [Tattoos], translated by Maghiel van Crevel and Michel Hockx, Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1994, pp. 75-95), which sounds like an authentic name and close to the Chinese, although it is not. Bonnie S. McDougall suggests Alnmouth, 130 miles north-west of Scarborough.

⁹ This was indeed the case in 1991.

The protagonist reflects on his life in Ai'ermeng, where he has spent the last decades of his life. He thinks about how he is treated by the villagers as a whole as well as by some of them individually. Frequently, he remembers brief episodes from the past in England as well as in his home country, China. Nothing much happens, until he enters the zoo, as is his habit, to look at the alligators, and in particular one specimen, an old, stuffed animal. There he exchanges some half-hearted bantering with one of the animal wardens. The warden tells him stories involving some past misbehaviour by Li and then makes up a story in order to provoke Li. That story is about a Chinese man and a very old alligator, with the animal possibly killing the man. Li is provoked and his retaliation follows: during a brief absence of the warden he tramples all over the old alligator in the enclosure, rendering him to dust, thereby re-enacting the story of the warden but with reversed roles. The flabbergasted warden calls the police upon his return and Li has no choice but to finish in style: he crawls into the enclosure with the younger alligators, knowing that he is not going to survive this encounter.

The plot development in this story is slow. Instead of action the reader is presented with the ramblings of an old man, whose recollections are triggered by chance happenings not in any particular chronological order, and often drifting away from the original train of thought.

One can discern two main themes in this story: ageing and living abroad. Both are interlinked, although exile itself is never mentioned. Li states that

“as with this village’s cemetery and church alike had my arrival and my residence long since lost its reason, or indeed the reason had long since lost its reasonability” [p.212],

thus leaving it open why and how he came to the village. As the story is dated 1991, it seems that the immediate sense of danger and the fear of recrimination back home of the first period of exile has receded: Duoduo creates a protagonist who might have been abroad as an exile only for a short time before other reasons than fear, persecution or political pressure ruled out a return. He does not try to predict (or let his protagonist, his alter ego of the future, tell with hindsight) these reasons. A lifetime of living abroad might produce too many different, constantly changing reasons, or, indeed, at the end none but habit. The scene worked out here is then the author's literary creation of one of the possible futures of an exile: not concerned with the reasons for it, he is nevertheless exploring the possibility of having to spend a lifetime far from home.

In this respect, "Going Home" is a unique story: its concern for a long-term future cannot be found in the work of any other of the writers analysed here. It may well be because Duoduo was the first of the group to reach the age of forty (about his age when he wrote this story), while the others were still in their thirties.

A sense of fatigue lies over the protagonist. He has become tired of living and there seems to be no reason for his existence at Ai'ermeng. This fatigue parallels one aspect of exile: possibly without having even committed a crime, just by stating one's opinion, to be forced to live thousands of miles away from one's home country, can be very reasonably seen as unjust and rather pointless. In any case, the sudden transition between cultures as different as the English and the Chinese might bewilder not just the exile, but anyone who has travelled for whatever reason between the two countries. Li puts it more crudely:

“Once [in London] [...] I bumped by accident into a Chinese person. Heads turned slightly away from each other, we tried to scrutinise the other. When our eyes, half-intentionally, half-involuntarily, met again, they both contained but one message: why on earth did you leave China? Right, and why for Pete’s sake are you here as well?” [p.213]

The parallels between Li in England and an exile’s experience continue. Li constantly refers to his ‘story’ - indeed, the ‘story’ is of the utmost importance to him. The story is his life, but also eventually costs him his life.

“They [the police] did not stop me, the story had to be finished.”
[p.222]

The senselessness of exile is also highlighted by the only reason that keeps Li alive: he is still waiting for something to happen, substituting the experience of going home. Perhaps he realises that after so many years, even home would not be home any longer. He longs to relate his life’s story to someone who can understand him:

“When the villagers say, ‘Look, that Chinese man is still waiting’, they are absolutely right. I am waiting. I am waiting for another Chinese person to arrive. I think it will be a young man, maybe a backpacker, maybe not. He will step down from the bus station, go around the corner at the second-hand book shop, and will then come straight to the small town square. Amid heavy rain, he will spot me as I approach him, and he will listen to me telling a story. If he

is willing to listen, I will be able to leave this world, or, as the Chinese put it: I will be able to go home.” [p.212]

This young man is a future alter ego of the protagonist. Like him he comes to England, but (and here the protagonist expresses a hope) he might have chosen to do so freely as a backpacker; while thousands of young people from the West descend on China every year, hardly any of their Chinese counterparts can do so in the West. This is the only optimistic note of the story, however: neither Li's life nor his presence in England are justified. The propelling force is the inevitability of “the story that has to be told”, and it does not matter whether the story is good or bad.

Exile may not only be experienced as senseless or unjust; it is also, no matter how long it lasts and how slim the chances of an end to it are, of a fundamentally temporal nature. The sense of being at a place for a limited time might diminish one's desire to assimilate. Very few of the present cohort of Chinese exiles have, for instance, ever mastered the language of their host country, and even fewer have taken up writing in the language of the host country.¹⁰ The Chinese exiles discussed here have had particular problems with the language barrier as they mostly reside in countries where Indo-European languages are spoken, which are far removed from their own language. The language barrier is also reflected in Duoduo's other short stories, for instance in “Meadows” (see below). In “Going Home”, the language issue is mentioned in a different way: there is no-one to speak Chinese to, so Li has to compensate for this loss.

¹⁰ One notable exception is the Stockholm-based poet Li Li, a contributor to *Today* who is also the author of several collections of poetry in Swedish.

The absence of any fellow Chinese makes Li find substitutions to indulge his craving for nostalgia. He regularly visits the only Chinese restaurant in town, not to eat, nor to converse with fellow Chinese, as the owner does not speak Chinese, but to look at a Chinese painting hanging on the wall. This nostalgia does not, according to Li, dominate his life but is rather a tonic to make his existence in England more tolerable:

“So every time I left the Phoenix restaurant, it was like walking out of a clinic, all my worries having been cured.” [p.214]

Looking at the oil painting even compensates for the lack of Chinese language partners:

“The light of the painting was so soft, soft as music, soft as the Chinese language.” [p.214]

On the whole, Li solves the problem of not having any Chinese interlocutor by talking to himself. When he reflects on the last time he heard Chinese, at a time when he was still living in London before he moved north, the conversation he had overheard on the subway is trivial and crude, but it, too, dealt with the theme of going home:

“‘Shouldn’t we just go back? Why the heck are we not going back?’

‘Who says we are not going back? Can we go back? If I was Ma Yoyo I’d go back.’

'It's Yo-yo Ma.'

'Whatever which way, people like him can sell their piss for 3000 pounds.'"

[p.214]¹¹

Here, "going home" is replaced with "going back", to underline the ambiguity of the term. "Home" in this story can never be understood as anything other than the place of origin, the home in China and not the temporary home in England, and its only other meaning instead of the place of origin is the place before that, i.e., before life began, which is similar to death [p.212]. "Back", however, could mean both the place where one lives and the place where one comes from. The conversation could then be understood as the first speaker wanting to go back to the place they live, but is immediately triggered to add that one might as well go home to China. The second speaker then reminds the first that they are not privileged enough to be able to do so, either because of lack of money or lack of fame. Unlike the majority of Chinese living outside China, Yo-yo Ma is famous both in his home country and abroad. Music transcends the constraints of languages, and possibly there is a tinge of envy hidden in this passage, as the writer Duoduo can only be appreciated "second-hand", i.e., in translation, while the would-be musician Duoduo would have had no such problem when faced with the same exile situation.

The nostalgic elements in "Going Home" also contribute to the failure of assimilation. Li remains an outsider all his life. Li is always seen as an outsider by his fellow villagers, and although he has outlived some of his oldest acquaintances, they extend their rejection of him even beyond their death:

¹¹ In the original, the first speaker gives the order of the characters forming Yo-yo Ma's name in the customary Chinese style of family name, given name. The second speaker reverses the order.

“At this age, it doesn’t really matter anymore whether I am a farmer or a writer, though it certainly does matter whether I am a cemetery warden or the cemetery gardener. Not all the villagers are quite happy with the idea of having a heathen attending their graves, so they do not want to be buried there.”
[p.211]

In this example, religious intolerance prevents the outsider from becoming part of the village, but this is compounded by Li’s inability, or maybe lack of desire, to conform to the norms of his host country. When nostalgia and cultural incompatibility clash, it can have farcical consequences. The zoo warden’s story does not directly refer to Li as its protagonist, although by Li’s embarrassed reaction it is clear that it was indeed about him:

“ ‘I’ve got another story, I’m sure you haven’t heard this one. The Chinese don’t have Christmas, do they? Or whatever holiday, what’s the biggest Chinese holiday again?’

‘Spring Festival.’

‘Right, Spring Festival. In Britain, we have another festival; it’s called St. Valentine’s Day. One year, that just happened to be on the same day as the Spring Festival. This old Chinese geezer made himself some sort of Chinese hamburger, the roll was made with rice flower, I think, and inside was some sort of sausage. He took a basket full onto the street and started shouting: ‘Today is a Chinese festival, please eat some Chinese hamburgers.’ The villagers all refused politely enough, just one girl came up and spoke to him:

‘So, St. Valentine’s Day is the biggest festival for the Chinese, then?’ The old man was transformed in an instant. At first he froze, but then he did something unspeakable: he took a savage bite out of his roll, at the same time squeezing the sausage with his hands out at the other end, dangling it in front of the girl, all the time laughing obscenely. And it didn’t finish there. He spent all night of St. Valentine’s at the graveyard howling and crying, terrorising the neighbourhood. Later, he completely denied this happening, said that there were ghosts howling, and that he had just copied the habit of British students when he squeezed the bun, it certainly wasn’t a Chinese tradition.’ ” [p.219]

Fittingly, the outsider does not work with people but with nature. Even after many years in Ai’ermeng, he has not become part of the people although he has become part of the scenery.¹²

Li’s anger at the ignorance of the villagers about the Chinese Spring Festival is answered by his exclusion from an Easter ceremony. Li at one point reflects on how people will spend Easter Sunday, which includes sitting down at the lunch table for a meal of fried duck before they dress up as Easter Bunnies to roam the streets [p.213]. This is, of course, not what happens on Easter Sunday in Britain.

Li also fails to appreciate the British sense of humour:

“[...] when I don’t understand a British joke, I want to laugh; when I do understand it, I never laugh.” [p.216-217]¹³

¹² Another inconsistency: at one point Li states that he had reached middle age in London before he moved north [p.213], at another he states that he was young, when already living in Ai’ermeng [p.211].

This is a rare example where Li criticises his host country. Usually, he does not compare home with exile or judge in one or the other's favour. He does not attach any universal value to customs, habits, language, life-styles or memories, but only values his own personal needs for certain things.

It is not the Chinese and the Other that is most frequently compared; it is the time, pre- and post-exile. The exile sees and experiences the present but is reminded of past pictures and past adventures. This is evident in Li's recollection of streets and buildings:

"When I was in London, I had already reached middle age. But I still walked to and from school carrying my school bag on the back, swinging my arms, as if a child was sitting inside me, directing me to do this and do that. Near Paddington station there were a number of red chimneys, and around King's Cross there were grey houses, which reminded me of a coal-yard near Xizhimen; the dusky atmosphere of Hyde Park evoked the memory of the water pool in Ox Street, where Ah Hong washed his hands before he started his work as butcher. The entrance to the Imperial Trade Bank in Piccadilly could sometimes suddenly be transformed into a little shop with the most varied goods lying on offer on the street, or into a cab rank outside Gongmenkou, or a queue of people, waiting for their number to come up,

¹³ Kam Louie reports a similar failure by Liu Sola to understand or appreciate British humour in his article "The translatability of Chinese culture", *Modern Chinese Literature* 1994:8, pp. 217-227. See page 218.

outside the Nr. 4 Oral Clinic West. From a narrow alley in Euston, I could even spot a white horse dashing madly to Guang'an Gate!" [p.213]

"Going Home" combines several aspects of the exile experience. Fear of the future is allayed by a scenario, which, even though the protagonist has to live all his life in exile and without any friends or sexual partner, is still bearable. The dying man's life flashes in front of his eyes. The scene is set, the will is written, he has premonitions [p.212] and the slightest reference to his childhood reduces him to tears [p.213]. All he has are his memories, and a new morbid occupation in a graveyard. Nostalgia is a dominant feature of his life, a life he can only understand by substituting his alien experience of abroad into ill-fitting pictures of the familiar past.

In the present, he has failed to assimilate. Partially, the parochial setting is to blame: the underlying suspicion of foreigners, perhaps even racism on the villagers' part. He has become part of the scenery but failed to become part of the people, so he deals with nature instead. His nostalgia results in constant substitutions: not understanding the alien world, he has to explain it in Chinese terms.

It is, however, not a desperately dark picture of the future. Li survives, apparently in good health, into old age, and he is content with his environment, however bleak it may be, as well as with his occupation. Memories serve as painkillers. There is always a way to adapt to the most difficult circumstances, and once life has been lived to the full is it possible to "go home". The final, optimistic note, is Li's date of death: April's Fool Day is also resurrection day.

6.3. "Tattoo"

"Tattoo" is unique in Duoduo's body of work for its fantastic setting in the middle of the New Mexican desert and for its surreal imagery. It features characters who are similarly bizarre.

The story is told in three parts by a first-person narrator called Li. In the first part, Li, a painter, meets Henry, a medical doctor and tattoo artist, at an art exhibition in Santa Fé. As a fellow artist, Li is invited to Henry's house in the desert. There Henry, whom Li addresses as 'Captain' [*Chuanzhang*], starts to philosophise. He also introduces Li to magic mushrooms. The second part begins when the drugs take their effect: Li suddenly hears piano music, wanders into the living room of the adjacent ranch and there meets Henry's wife, Suzanne. She is not in the least surprised to meet him and even knows his name and nationality. Subsequently, the two go into the bedroom where she tries to seduce him, but he is repelled by her age and figure. He goes back to find that Henry, under the influence of the drugs, also tries to make advances. Li rejects him, too, and goes to bed. In the third part, he wakes up and reality is restored. Henry explains that their trip seemed to last much longer than it really did, but Li holds no grudge, bids farewell to the doctor and leaves the house for the desert.

The central motif of the story is the mushroom. As soon as Li has eaten a mushroom sandwich, he starts hallucinating. In his drug-inspired dream, he meets Suzanne and almost scientifically observes her nude, tattooed body. A dragon sweeps down her lower body, its lips kissing her vagina, which, he muses, forms a pair of black mushrooms [pp. 57-58]. After Li returns to Henry's house, he walks around blindly, feeling a carpet of mushrooms underneath his feet. [p. 58]

The story is full of ambiguities and tensions. Reality and unreality blend into each other; it remains unclear whether Suzanne exists or whether she is a figment of Li's dream. Indeed a reading is possible in which Li did not take any drugs, wandered over to Suzanne's ranch, rejected her advances, walked back and found the tattoo artist on a trip. There are a few pointers, however, which make such a reading implausible: the images of the mushroom carpet; the fleshy walls of the house [p.57]; the fact that Li, soberly, never leaves the house to meet Henry's former wife, but walks back to his house from her ranch through the desert in his drug-induced state [p.57]; Li thinks he had been in Suzanne's ranch for three days [p.57], when the artist later states that the trip only lasted a couple of hours [p.59]; after his rejection Suzanne disappears into the bathroom of her ranch, but Li then imagines having to listen to the shower all night in the Henry's house [p.58]; and lastly the artist's surprise when he hears from Li that he had met Suzanne: he thinks Li had imagined it and puts it down to the effect of the drugs [p.59].

Li's attitude to his sexuality is also ambiguous. At the beginning he feels

“an intriguing feeling of satisfaction swelling up, the tips of my fingers are somewhat numb, but I feel carefree and joyous, as if I had just slept with a woman I had just met, and I wished the world could always be like this at this moment.” [p.55]

Given the opportunity to do exactly this, i.e. sleeping with a woman he has just met, he is frightened and declines. One could also argue that this description of his mood, still early in the day, already shows the effects of drugs: “an intriguing feeling

of satisfaction" [*qimiao manzukan*], "numbness" [*mabi*], "carefree and joyous" [*xinkuang shenyi*] might not be a natural reaction to a day in the desert.

Henry's motives for inviting Li home are also ambiguous. Suzanne warns Li (or is it Li's inner voice) that he might be sexually attracted to him because of his smooth skin, and might even want to keep him prisoner. Certainly, Henry is no prude, shaving in the nude and even contemplating shaving his private parts in front of Li [p.55]. Li himself has no qualms about undressing in front of Henry when he returns from his 'trip'.

Li's skin makes him desirable to both sexes: for Henry, the hairless skin of a Chinese man represents the perfect canvas, while Suzanne lusts after him as his "skin [is] smooth as a thousand dollar leather jacket." [p.57]

While mushrooms are a central motif, for both female sexuality and drugs, another motif is less explicit but still central to the profession of the tattoo artist: the needle. The tattoo artist is re-creating his wife as an art object, sacrificing seven years and one of his eyes for the art work on her body. The needle allows his artistic fulfilment: it is only pain that makes art, although it is not necessarily the artist who has to suffer. Li is not the artist here, nor is he the artist's instrument. He is the observer, rejecting the passion of sex, even staying calm through the drug-induced trip, not expressing any sentiments, just observing the changed nature of his environment. The only sensual sensation he experiences is a tingling feeling in his fingertips. His neutrality is underlined by his attractiveness to both partners. He is the ideal medium for the tattoo artist, but Li is even afraid of the tiny pins in a factory-wrapped shirt [p. 59], and thus declines to make himself available. But when Li awakes hung-over from his drugged sleep, even the sunrays are like "thorns" tormenting his abused body [p.58].

Further tension is brought into the story by the apparent timelessness of the setting. Deserts are lifeless as well as timeless, while Henry has long withdrawn from ordinary life and fled to the virtual timelessness of drugs. He sees tattoos as a permanent and thus timeless art. Yet these images of eternity are rudely exposed by the narrator as being of transient nature: even the seemingly unchangeable desert is transformed by wandering dunes, "god's calligraphy." [p.55] Even tattoos are alive: the ageing body of Suzanne has transformed an object of beauty and art into a sexually repulsive pattern. Beauty is only ever transient in this story, and Li is likewise a transient visitor: having accepted his fate, he collects experiences without becoming emotionally involved; he does not reflect on his own action but on others'. He is the true outsider but of his own volition: he gets invited (to the artist's house, to be tattooed, and to have sex with his wife), yet he rejects all these offers.

Henry does not seem to mind being rejected. Li's rather brutal rejection of Suzanne, however, seems to betray a lack of sexual confidence. At first, he tries to hide behind his own language, swearing at Suzanne in Chinese that he does not want to "x" his mother (the cross here is either the author's or the editor's choice to avoid using a vulgar word). His outburst also means that he does not want to have sex with someone of his mother's generation. Then in desperation, he repeats the phrase in English (politely and incongruously preceding it with "excuse me") [p. 58]. Suzanne is also badly treated by her former husband. She has been, he claims, created by him, the tattoo artist. The message here is: artists are selfish.

Li is a rootless person. Apparently without convictions, he drifts towards the artist who lives in a self-imposed exile in the desert. But, though drawn to a fellow outsider, Li is bound to a nomadic life: his rejection is flight. In the end he cuts the artist out of his life:

“Although I thought of him as a doctor, and also as a tattoo artist, he was in addition a drug addict, and so I forgot him.” [p.59]

He detects the sense of abandonment and the loneliness he also feels:

“He really was too lonely, a man whom women had abandoned, an artist abandoned by art, in many ways a bit like me.” [p.59]

But it is not for Li to stay in the desert:

“I was still far away from him, about this strange wilderness I knew nothing,”
[p.59]

He is, however, comfortable in his solitude. The final image resembles a pastiche from a Hollywood Western, Li the lonesome cowboy riding into the sunset:

“Humming a tuneless song, I walked on, driving my memories like cattle into the clouds.” [p.59]

This story is not so much the story of a man driven into exile by politics or society, but that of an inner exile, aloof from society yet inexplicably drawn to it. If Li is the author's alter ego, then he has travelled from inner exile in China to exile abroad finally to inner exile in exile.

6.4. "Vacation"

Li, a Chinese language assistant at a university, is going with friends on a week-end break to Lake George, near Toronto. In this story, Li is in a stable relationship with a Canadian woman called Annie. The group consists of five persons; apart from Annie and Li there are Annie's former schoolmates Robin and his girlfriend, and a teenage cousin of Annie's, called Tommy. The trip is marred by the surliness of the teenager and the tension between the couples. The trip is shortened when Robin decides he has to return to Toronto a day early: the drive back home is made in a very tense atmosphere.

There are autobiographical elements in this story: for example Li's job as a Chinese language assistant and his residence in Toronto. Possibly, as in "Meadow", the other story set in Toronto, the plot is based on a real event, which leads the author to use a third-person narrator in order to create some distance between himself and his fictional alter ego. A dominating theme in this story is Li's memory of his deceased mother, and this story, the only one to feature either of Li's parents at any length, might be an attempt to come to terms with the loss of his own mother.¹⁴ This is especially pertinent in Li's attempt to replace his mother with his girlfriend. He tries to call her mum, but she refuses to be called so, and resists any of his attempts to persuade her to play along [pp.49-50]. In his dreams, Li sees his mother, and he remembers their family life with the fondness of habit, a "habit of forty years" [p.48]

The death of Li's mother has triggered other concerns: Li is faced with middle-age, its anxieties and illnesses highlighted by the youth of Annie's cousin to whom Li

¹⁴ See Gregory B. Lee, *Troubadours, Trumpeters, Troubled Makers: lyricism, nationalism and hybridity in China and its Others*, London: Hurst, 1996, p.141.

feels an affinity. This is the only story in which those concerns are voiced. In most other stories Li is the observer to whom things happen, but he does not reflect on their effects on him. The one exception, "Going Home", differs as Li is already an old man nearing death and the empathy evoked is for the old man's past, not for his present problems.

There is an age difference between Annie and Li: she is a student (albeit an eternal student with three master's degrees [p.47]); Li is middle-aged [p.48]. He is world-weary, experienced and street-wise; Annie despite her education is too narrow-minded, pragmatic and taking things too literally for his liking. Li's age is apparent in his incontinence:

"Li followed Annie to the bedroom, immediately he felt an uncomfortable wetness down there, he turned around to take a leak. He knew clearly that this did not much help, and that he was still dripping. He went to the bathroom and took a towel to clean himself. Returning he saw that Annie had been waiting for him. As soon as he noticed this, he leaked again." [p.53]

Tommy, the teenager in their group, gives Li a demonstration of his youthful fitness, diving into the lake from a rock high above it. He seems to challenge Li to follow him in displaying athletic prowess, but Li has accepted that he is too old for these games. Indeed, he is comforted by the fact that his age allows him to get out of such contests without losing face [p.52].

He flirts with the image of middle-age by stroking his belly, "cheese, beer, and grievances", he states, but is silenced by Annie who is afraid he might add: "I am old." [pp. 51-52] For Li, middle age is not an entirely negative state. He has accepted

that his youth is over but he is not yet ready to retire either. He describes his state as “the age where both birth and death are far away”. His anxiety is not always allayed by brave talk: he drinks a large amount of alcohol throughout the three days, and admits he does not drink for pleasure but to get drunk. His own worries combine with the worry about Annie’s future when he criticises her for endlessly continuing with her studies: “what will you do [with your life] when you are finished?” [p.47]

Another theme is the issue of Chineseness. Li defines it by ethnicity. Robin’s girlfriend, who does not speak Chinese and has a hybrid name, which Li cannot recall but says shows neither Western or Chinese origin, is seen by him as Chinese: it is not one’s mother tongue, nor country of birth or nationality that counts for Li. [p.46]

As an outsider, language is what separates Li most from his new home; it even descends into his relationship. Although more mature, he is inferior and loses arguments when his girlfriend gets into her stride. Li resents the fact that Annie’s profession is language and that she knows how to exploit the logic of the English language, a task beyond Li [p.47]. Although Li had never been a student, he sees himself as the more worldly-wise, but he cannot prove it because of his poor English. Li arrived in Canada as an adult and his English language skills are far from perfect. He reads a magazine but fails to understand the English word “teenager” and has to ask for its meaning [p.53].

The tension of the story derives from the tension between the characters: Li quarrels with Annie, both of them quarrel with Robin, and all agree that Tommy is insufferable. The solution of the tension however, reveals a surprising picture, as it is Tommy who provides it. The tension between the adults has stifled the atmosphere and no breakthrough is possible. The tension in the relationship between Annie and Li

will erupt once the stand-off with Robin is solved. Instead of a relaxing weekend, all adults return more stressed and angry than when they set off. Only the teenager enjoys his life, despite outward signs to the contrary.

This story laments the loss of youth. Li accepts what fate has in store for him. His mother's death, however, leads to middle-age angst and incontinence, and his desire to replace his mother with his girlfriend suggests that the narrator (and possibly the author) has yet to come to terms with it. This crisis leads to a questioning of the future and the past.

6.5. "Meadow"

Li is again the protagonist in "Meadow", but it is written in the third person. The story is set in Toronto, and the action, such as there is, occurs on the meadows of a park near the centre of the city.

Li undertakes his usual afternoon stroll that leads him across a cemetery towards the meadow, where he meets Lisa. They lie down next to an older, white-haired man. Lisa regales Li with stories from her extended family, after which the subject changes to the sexual practices of ancient China. After more mindless chit-chat, mostly provided by Lisa, they are joined by another Canadian friend, Charlie. They play word games with each other until Charlie leaves. Li starts dreaming that he is tied to a rocket and blasts away from the meadow, flying over downtown Toronto. Li then watches himself as a child, growing up in Beijing, walking past the White Pagoda, and having his first sexual experiences. He remembers spending time with his older brother and he remembers his sister Ermao (Ermao is also his nickname for Lisa). Li then remembers his grandmother's cooking, then her death and funeral. This

brings him down to earth. Lisa, about to leave the meadow, gives him her bracelet as a present. In another flashback, Li remember his schooldays, standing to attention with his classmates on a sports field, and listening to the principal lecture on the evils of hooliganism. The principal censures the author of an essay criticising hooliganism who inadvertently betrayed himself to be one; it seems that Li was that author. Afterwards, the pupils rush to the canteen, where the heads of two freshly killed rams are displayed. Eagerly, they suck the marrow from the horns, but Li comes too late to get anything but maggots. Back in Toronto, evening has set and Li returns home, accompanied by Lisa and the white-haired man who opens the door for him.

“Meadow” contrasts Li’s routine and stable existence with recollections from a troubled past. Outwardly, he is living a comfortable life with a secure job, income, home and friends. Although it is not explicitly stated, the intimacy between Li and Lisa suggests that they have a sexual relationship. The setting is peaceful: the park is next to a statue next to a cemetery. In the distance, people play golf; a jogger runs nearby; a dog is taken for a walk. The whole scene is overlooked by a bell tower. There is almost no action in the present, only conversation interspersed with dreams from Li’s childhood. The link between past and present is established in the opening scene: Li wanders round the cemetery, reading the inscriptions on gravestones. He looks for those of children who died young:

“George Douglas 1904-1907, Alex Thomas 1941-1943, Mary Ann Brown 1935-1938, Karin Lewis 1963-1966.” [p. 62]

This is possibly a homage to Duoduo’s daughter, who also died in infancy.

This reminder of mortality is not the only incident which undermines the peaceful atmosphere: Li himself approaches the meadow muttering in Chinese under his breath “fuckyoufuckyoufuckyoufuckyoufuckyou.” [p.62] He does so mantra-like; if he is upset by the gravestones, this is not made obvious. He enjoys being able to utter vulgarisms (he does so again on a later occasion [p.68]); as no-one speaks his language, he is in no fear of being overheard.

Li’s behaviour in this story is less detached than in the previous analysed stories. He is easily upset, manipulative and nostalgic. His sense of displacement is pointed out rudely by Lisa. He wants to be part of the place but is upset when Lisa tells him:

“After all, you are newly arrived.”

“I am not newly arrived.”

“Yes you are, you are on holiday.” [p.64]

This is doubly insulting, firstly because Lisa does not accept him as part of her society, secondly because she does not give him any credit for having particular reasons to come to Canada; for her he is just someone “on holiday.” This shatters the carefully established routine of the narrator, but again Lisa fails to see a connection and continues with a superficial story of which Li disapproves. Three times he asks her if she has finished with her stories [p.65], but he has little choice but to allow her to continue. He is no match to Lisa’s eloquence. She drowns him and his thoughts with her stories and she also wins all arguments. Li experiences the frustration of the non-native speaker: his story is not being told:

“Listening to Lisa’s stories is like reading a book in a foreign language without a dictionary.” [p.64]

He only has dreams, which he cannot communicate but which allow him a respite from Lisa [pp.68-72].

In no other story, apart from “Vacation”, with which it shares some characteristics, is Li so much part of the landscape, but this is the only story where he is constantly reminded by others about his foreignness and loneliness. Lisa is honest in her assessment:

“All I am talking about comes from television, but aren’t we obliged to use this material to our profit? It helps us to understand our problems. For instance, do you know why you are lonely? It’s because you can’t draw on that, can you?” [p.65]

Li’s estrangement is caused by his recent arrival; his inability to become part of his new environment is because he cannot share that environment’s past experiences, even if these shared experiences are as shallow and second-hand as those derived from television.

Apart from a shared past, language and culture sets Li apart. Lisa is curious about the sexual practices of the Chinese [p.66] and Li is puzzled by Lisa’s attitude towards sexual gestures. Linguistically, the division is most apparent when they and Charlie play language games. Now Li can use his exoticism to his advantage. He speaks first in Japanese and then in Chinese, and then asks his friends to guess in what language he just spoke. Even when they guess correctly, Li is unwilling to give up his

one area of authority, so he flatly denies that the Chinese he spoke was indeed Chinese. He is vindicated when Lisa, who suspects that he is cheating, cannot catch him out: instead she thinks both their correct answer and Li's wrong answer were incorrect [p.68].

Not allowed by Lisa to forget his status as newly arrived, and stimulated by the language game, Li flees into his own world of dreams. The author finds a technically neat solution to the problem of linking Li's presence lying next to Lisa and his imminent departure into a dream: hearing Lisa's stern voice, Li suddenly remembers the voice of a nurse at a Beijing hospital, admonishing him to relax so that she can give him an injection. "Don't be tense", the nurse scolds, "I'm not tense" are Li's last words before the simulated effect of an injection carries him towards a dream [p.69].

The launch into his dream is the dream of a launch: Li imagines being strapped onto a rocket which carries him over Toronto then ever onwards. Li is seized by panic:

"The rocket powers on, he is sent to outer space. He cries out: 'I am stuck to the rocket, I will never get back again!'" [p.70]

The use of the word 'again' betrays the deeper root of Li's fear: having been sent away once, his greatest fear is to be removed forcibly again. But the journey does not take Li to outer space: he is transported into his memories of home. These include remembering growing up with his sister and brother [p. 70], the food served to him by his grandmother (pickled cucumber skin and aniseed dumplings) and the sound made by her bound feet [p.71] His awakening sexuality is recalled, how he experimented with his friends Little Erchun and Qiuming [p.70], but also how he was shocked to

discover the outward signs of developing sexuality in his sister Ermao [p.71]. The closeness he feels to Ermao he tries to replicate in his relationship with Lisa, but Lisa does not understand, suspecting that Ermao is a Chinese name for prostitute [p.66]. Li also remembers the death of his grandmother and feels guilt for having inadvertently caused her death: she catches him stealing food from her and while she chases him away, she stumbles and later dies [p.71].

Another memory is triggered by a remark Lisa made earlier in their conversation:

“‘Once there was a hooligan’, Lisa began.

‘Once there was a hooligan’, Li returned to Lisa’s side, leaning against her back, “there was a hooligan in our school, he wrote a story about a hooligan, saying that once there was a hooligan...” [p.68]

Li is interrupted by Lisa and cannot finish his story. In the dream, however, he re-lives the experience [pp. 72-73]. Li’s memories are both nostalgic and bitter. His memories of his family are about food and his own growing sexual awareness. He admired his older brother, cared for his sister and loved his grandmother. Yet he also recalls the taste of the maggot he inadvertently sucks in trying to get the marrow out of a ram’s horn and the poverty in which they lived. He remembers the unfairness in his youth: he was last to reach the horns, and his brother failed to get accepted to university for three years in a row [p.70].

There is an immediacy to life in Li’s recollections that is missing in his present life. Even in his imagination the contrast is stark. Wondering who lives in the bell tower, Li gradually realises that the white-haired man lying next to him is its guardian,

jotting down his memories of life inside the tower during the winter. Li's recollections of China are from the past, but now he foreshadows his knowledge of a winter spent inside the tower and muses:

“Watching from inside the closed windows of the tower over all of winter, and [learning] about the routine of life: queuing for milk, preparing porridge, tearing bread, having an Irish performance [*sic*] before putting the spoon into the bowl, afterwards electrotherapy, lunch, a stroll, sunbathing, and all evening watching television programmes showing beads of sweat flying from a jaw hit by a gloved fist...” [p.73]

The bell tower symbolises Li's vision of himself: an isolated landmark, overlooking the city and home to a comfortable but not particularly meaningful life. The white-haired man, unknown to Li but in some way taking control of his life, is the author himself: he chronicles Li's life, opens the doors for him (again, both in reality and literally) and even knows some of Li's future and steers him towards it.

Memories of his family show Li to be far from home. The reliability of family and the strength of his brother are lacking in his new environment, where friendship is shallow and behaviour selfish. But Li accepts these conditions in order to assimilate. Settling down may be one of the aspirations of the exile, but even when the exile wishes to end the non-permanence of exile and become an émigré, he still has to overcome the reluctance of the new home to accept him.

6.6 “The Hotel”

In “The Hotel”, Li’s story is told in third person narration. The story is set in a sea resort in France, near Mont Saint Michel, where Li had travelled from Paris by train. The time span is two days and one night.

The story opens with Li and a new acquaintance, Ulrika, in bed in a hotel room. The guests next door have just returned and begin to have sex very audible. When silence has returned, Li leaves the room to go to the hallway, where he meets the male half of the couple next door, a bald man with a beard. A flashback describes how Li came to travel from Paris and how he met Ulrika in the compartment of his train. Originally, he was supposed to meet an old Chinese friend of his, Xiaoqin, a woman he had spent much time with when they were both still living in Beijing. She had since been living in Barcelona and Madrid, while he had been to the United States and Europe. Li thought that he had spotted her on the platform after disembarking from the train and decides to play a trick on her, sneaking up behind her. The woman starts screaming, however, and in the subsequent confusion, Li loses sight of her. He leaves the train station alone and walks aimlessly along the beach. Meeting Ulrika again, he asks her whether she knows a cheap hotel nearby.

The focus of the story shifts to the bearded man. He is sitting on a couch in front of a small audience, to whom he reads from his book. The recitation goes badly because a woman in the audience is suffering from an upset stomach; the noise she makes upsets him.

After the reading the writer and the audience retire for drinks and Ulrika joins the group. The writer is in some unexplained way connected to her but his advances are met with rejection. Finally she humiliates him by slapping a piece of chewing gum

on his bald pate. After the writer leaves in a huff, Ulrika and Li (who had suddenly arrived and witnessed this scene) exchange glances and she now asks him about a hotel. Together they book in, have dinner, then retire to the hotel room. There she tells him travel stories, including tales of how she has in the past fought off unwanted advances from men. This only serves to frighten Li from making any advances himself, although it does not seem to bother Ulrika, who falls asleep.

The next morning, Li is alone on the street and witnesses a fight. A woman is forcibly kept in a car: she is trying to get out but is restrained by a male hand. Through the half-opened car door, Li recognises Ulrika's nightgown, but then the bald man sticks his head out of the car and chases the onlookers, including Li, away.

Li then goes to a bus station to get a bus to Mont Saint Michel. The only other person waiting for the bus is a girl. When the bus fails to arrive at the advertised time, they both look out at the sea. He wanders around and so fails to notice that the bus has finally arrived and is about to depart. At first he does not want to chase after it, but when the girl in the bus waves to him, he starts running. Then he realises that she is waving at another man, who is also trying to catch the bus. He recognises the other man: it is the mysterious bald writer.

The mystery of the story is the role the 'other man' plays: is he the narrator's or the Duoduo's alter ego? The narrator's profession is not revealed. Duoduo might have portrayed himself or possibly some of his character traits: those he sees negatively might have been incorporated in the figure of the writer, creating the author's antithesis. The bald man is more assertive and more successful sexually than Li, and he has a mysterious hold over Ulrika. Although Li spends the night with her, he does not have sex with her. Li does not reveal whether he sees this as a failure or

not. Despite talking to Ulrika as if he wanted a long-term relationship, he drifts out of her life the next morning, only to be drawn back in by a coincidence. Even then, he only gets peripherally involved and ultimately is chased away. Again, he does not feel humiliated but goes on with his day.

Li does seem to attract women, or at least he thinks that the women he observes in turn observe him. But there is always another explanation to the gestures of attraction the women in the story make to Li. The woman waving at him from the window of the bar where the writer is giving his reading is in fact suffering from an upset stomach and is relieving herself out of the window [p.57]. The girl waving from the bus is waving at someone who turns out to be the writer. [pp.61-62]

Li is adept at hiding his disappointments and adapting to new circumstances. The reason for his journey was to see his old friend Xiaoqin, but even when he fails to find her, he manages on his own just as well; the thought of returning does not occur to him, perhaps because he has no home to return to. Instead, he is meeting new people. Yet, all those contacts remain superficial; even though he and Ulrika discuss the possibility of living together and raising children, their relationship is never consummated. This is a feature of Li's life abroad: he shows that it is possible to survive and exist. Life abroad can even be exciting and fun, but ultimately it remains shallow. Yet the past has little relevance to the present and returning to China is out of the question. There is no bragging about living abroad; there is no self-pity. The possibility for nostalgia is recognised but rejected.

This is the only one of Duoduo's stories where the nationality of the protagonist is not an issue, although his recollections of Xiaoqin show that he is Chinese. The nationalities of the other characters is incidental.

The exact location of the story is not important. The famous setting near Mont Saint Michel is described matter-of-factly, assuming that the reader is at least vaguely familiar with it. The description does not dwell on anything typical for the region: nothing is highlighted as 'typically French'. In fact, there are a number of occasions where English is spoken: by the love-making couple next door to Li's hotel room [p.53] and by Li himself when he tries to converse with a French fisherman, predictably failing to start a conversation, although he manages to make himself understood [p.62].

Li's ease in dealing with an alien environment could also be indifference stemming from the repeated experience of being in different places. It is in contrast with his failure to engage with the memory of his past. He might even have frightened away his friend Xiaoqin, although afterwards he is not sure whether it had been her. His failure to reconnect with China and the uncertainty of recognition show the protagonist's alienation from his home country, to an extent that he is estranged even from close friends. The link between Xiaoqin and narrator on the one hand, and between home and exile on the other, has another common trait: Li manages to stay in touch with Xiaoqin by exchanging letters, yet they fail to recognise each other when they meet [p.54-55]. An exile who returns home might have the same experience, despite having stayed in touch with home throughout the time of exile; both home and returnee will have changed and might fail to recognise each other. It had been five years since he had last seen his friend; it was nearly five years since Duoduo had left China.

Li's relationship with Ulrika is a comment on his relationship with his place of exile in Western Europe. He is drawn to her because he notices the similarities between them:

“In the morning, when Li boarded the train in Paris, he didn’t know that the girl with the braided hair was called Ulrika. Her eyes were cold and stern, but also weary, as if she had seen enough from life. Li felt like her.”
[p.54]

Their easy-come easy-go relationship is a comment on the superficiality of relationships in the West. Li assumes an intimacy with Ulrika that is not based on a shared past or expected shared future; similarly he parts from Ulrika with a complete lack of sadness. Li’s successful assimilation (holidays in France, conversing in English) is based on his willingness to become as superficial as he assumes his environment is.

Technically, this is Duoduo’s most sophisticated story. In cinematic terms, the story opens with a static shot of Li and Ulrika together in bed. A flashback takes the action to the train station, and from there in one long frame the film camera zooms over the landscape, following the protagonist from one location to another, before panning out to another vista which includes the previous object of attention as well as another building. To this, the camera zooms in again, now to settle with another person in focus, and so forth, before returning to Li, where the final image is that of the protagonist left behind, the action disappearing into the distance. This gives the story a languid feeling, a long, uninterrupted drive by the camera allowing the eye to dwell on the landscape and buildings as much as on the acting persons. The parallel to a film is not too far-fetched: all the protagonists meet in a stage-managed way. This technique might be the reason that this story is written from a third-person

perspective. But despite the changing focus, all strands of the story eventually involve Li.

The final image is of Li catching his breath, wondering about Ulrika's relationship with the bald man. But these thoughts are soon dispelled; Li proves he has adapted to the superficiality of his environment: "This was none of his business."
[p.62]

6.7. Conclusion

All the stories are set abroad and deal with the life of the protagonist abroad. The protagonist is always Li, the author's semi-autobiographical alter ego who shares his surname. Life abroad is always juxtaposed with life in China, the comparisons often not flattering to either side.

Li's loneliness is shown on three different levels: his relationships with other Chinese; his relationships with natives of the host countries; and his relationships with women as potential sexual partners:

There is hostility towards other Chinese persons in "Going Home"; in "The Hotel" the other Chinese person is afraid of Li and runs away. In "Vacation", the Chinese woman does not even speak Chinese; no other person speaks Chinese in "Meadow", which is a source of pride and regret in equal measure to the narrator. No matter in which environment, Li nowhere gains an advantage from being with his fellow countrymen. He is always on his own.

He is stereotyped by the native people he encounters, sometimes through pity ("Hitchhiking"), sometimes because of his features ("Tattoo"), sometimes because of his cultural otherness ("Going Home"). Li is excluded from his host societies either by the natives, such as the zookeeper in "Going Home", or excludes himself, as in

“Meadow” and “Vacation”.

All the women Li meets eventually disappear or reject him: in “The Hotel” Xiaoqin fails to recognise him, Ulrika excludes him from her life and the woman at the hotel window and the girl at the bus stop are not interested in him. In most stories, sex, in particular as the setting is in the liberal West as opposed to the repressive China, is tantalisingly close at hand yet strangely unconsummated. In “Meadows”, Lisa bares her breasts readily, licks Li’s face and shows other signs of intimacy, but she is not described as his partner. In “Hitchhiking”, the wanton embrace, leading to more intimate contact, seems to be the kind of casual sex possible in the West, yet here the sexual partner is suddenly revealed to be a cross-dressing man: caveat emptor for the innocent from abroad. In “Tattoo”, Li is offered the sexual services of both a man and a woman, and again he backs out. The story which most consistently looks at the outcome of a life in exile, “Going Home”, portrays Li as an old man who has lacked a partner throughout his exile life. This might mirror the author’s difficulties of finding friends and a (sexual) partner in exile. Li is a loner, and so was Duoduo described before and after exile.¹⁵

There are very few examples of self-reflection by the protagonist, with the exceptions of “Vacation” and “Going Home”. Li is alternately nostalgic (for home, for food, for family, for the Chinese language and for Chinese culture), and completely detached. In “Meadows”, he is simultaneously proud and ashamed of his Chineseness. He also fails to understand the cultures and customs of his host countries.

By most outward signs, “Going Home” represents an attempt at closure. The title already indicates the author’s desire to confront the exile experience directly: the

¹⁵ Gregory B. Lee, “An introduction to Duoduo’s work by Gregory Lee”, in: *The Manhattan Review*, vol. 6:1, Fall 1991, pp. 13-4.

future of the exile is taken to a hypothetical conclusion.

It would be misleading to discuss Duoduo's work from the perspective of exile only. Other themes which have only been touched upon in the preceding analysis include death and sexuality. Even these, however, can be read in context with the exile experience (death as escape from exile, and sexuality as highlighting an exile's alienation) but they can also stand independently for scrutiny.

Duoduo shows himself as a versatile and accomplished writer. Even though it is his poetry for which he is famous, Duoduo also excels at fiction. He experiments with style without letting it dominate plot and structure. The best examples of such experiments occur in "Tattoo" and "The Hotel" with their complex narrative structures and multiple foci. More conventionally, Duoduo often uses flashbacks and dream-like sequences, be they sleep or drug-induced. The endings are almost always ambiguous or open, as in "Going Home". Only the ending of "Tattoo" concludes an episode in the life of the narrator, with an ironic nod to the Hollywood culture of his host country at the time.

In 1997, Duoduo described his attitude towards writing and reading his works as follows:

"The writing is up to me, the works are up to the reader."¹⁶

With this statement, he wants to disassociate himself from the interpretation of his own works or even from commenting on other's interpretations. Once a story is

¹⁶ Duoduo, "Xue bu shi baised" [Snow is not white], in: Wan Zhi, *Goutong: miandui shijie de Zhongguo wenxue—Zhongguo zuojia yantaohui wenji* [Breaking the Barrier: Chinese Literature Facing the World – collected essays from a symposium for Chinese writers], Stockholm: Olof Palme

written, his involvement ends, and the reader takes over. He went on to state that this was his stance when he lived in China and it remains true for him abroad. He wants his poetry to be understood on a level transcending language and cultural barriers, maintaining that at its best poetry is able to achieve this feat. As he was commenting on his poetry, it would be unwise to assume the validity of it for his prose work as well, yet it does not seem unlikely that Duoduo wants to establish a similar rapport with the readers of his fiction.

His refusal to comment on interpretation allowed reviews stressing the exile experience to dominate. The mostly positive reviews of a collection of Duoduo's short stories in Dutch translation all have one thing in common: they are attracted by what is for them exotic, and they dwell on his escape from China, although some of the stories in this collection were written before his exile.¹⁷ One example:

"Obviously, his state of mind is partially inherent, but it also has a lot to do with exile."¹⁸

A discussion of Duoduo as writer is nearly absent: extra-textual information may have already clouded the reviewers' judgement. Tellingly, one of the few negative reviews of Duoduo's prose appeared in a specialist magazine.¹⁹

International Center, 1997, pp. 67-70, quote from p. 67.

¹⁷ Duoduo, *Tatoeages* [Tattoos], op. cit. The two stories in question are "Sumo", pp. 7-20, originally published in *Zhongguo* [China] in 1986, and "Wie weet hoe lang die arme jongen nog moet blijven rennen..." [Who knows for how long these poor boys have to keep on running...], pp. 21-28, published in 1986 as well, in *Qingchung* [Youth].

¹⁸ Helen Saelman, "In het hooi bij een Schotse boer" [In the hay with a Scottish farmer] in: *NRC Handelsblad CS Literair*, 24 February 1995.

¹⁹ Jan Hoffmann in "Vrolijk kerstfeest, Chinees!" [Happy Christmas, Chinaman!], in: *China Nu* [China

Gregory Lee sees in Duoduo's poetic work a continuous progression from inner exile to real exile: he sets a political reading next to the personal, and makes full use of the extra-textual information available.²⁰ van Crevel tries to stay as close to the text as possible and avoids politicising by downplaying the relevance of exile: "without a blurb, China and Duoduo's exile are nowhere to be found."²¹ He then softens his stance by giving a very convincing exile reading to a sizeable number of Duoduo's poems between 1989 and 1994, and concedes that "the 'exile angle' proves valid and rewarding."²² Nevertheless, his conclusion is that Duoduo is an "exiled poet but not an exile-poet, and June Fourth does not constitute a dividing line between different stages in his oeuvre."²³ Here van Crevel and Lee agree; the thread of exile continues relatively seamlessly from inner exile to actual exile.

As the preceding analysis of his fiction shows, however, there is a discernible difference between these two states, and that in his subsequent stories Duoduo portrays his main character as suffering from both inner exile and actual exile symptoms. But internal exile did not prepare Duoduo for the severity of "external" exile, and he had to struggle to adapt²⁴, though he does claim that he has left behind

Now] 1995:1, who, confronted with some of the more stilted prose Duoduo is capable of, condemns it as "stammering" and prefers to read instead "a dictionary".

²⁰ See in particular chapter 5, "Exile and the potential of modernism" in Gregory B. Lee, *Troubadours, Trumpeters, Troubled Makers: Lyricism, Nationalism, and Hybridity in China and its Others*, London: Hurst, 1996, pp. 128-148.

²¹ van Crevel, *Language Shattered: contemporary Chinese poetry and Duoduo*, Leiden: Centre for Non-Western Publications, 1996, p. 226.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 233.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 233-234.

²⁴ Vanza, *Duoduo: poeta in patria, poeta in esilio* [Duoduo: Poet at Home, Poet in Exile], unpubl. 'tesi di laurea', University of Venice. See first question of appendix (not paginated).

him the period where exile dominated his life.²⁵ Duoduo gained a better understanding of his inner exile once he experienced actual exile, and as an exile he readjusted accordingly. These are changes directly reflected in his work, most notably of cultural assimilation and attempts to overcome alienation. For instance, once Duoduo moved to Canada, his protagonist Li becomes more critical of the culture of his host country, as is evident in "Vacation" and "Meadow". To dismiss these exile experiences would detract from any analysis.

²⁵ As stated above in Duoduo's biography. Based on interview with Duoduo, Leiden, June 1995.

7. Conclusion

A summary of the aspects under which the literary analysis of the texts by this thesis's four key writers has been undertaken show similarities that are mostly based on their shared exile experience. Some stories have other themes but are still influenced by the exile thematic, and only relatively few stories can not be read under the exile angle. Exile is also an element which binds all four writers, despite their many differences, together.

Most stories of all key writers have a first person narrator and are of autobiographical nature. The settings of nearly all stories are outside China, often in the host countries of the writers. Often, the set is important to the plot development, in particular for the stories by Yo Yo and Liu Sola, sometimes it is not, as is the case for some of Duoduo's stories. Xu Xing's stories are set in an unreal or non-descript place ("F City").

Soliloquies, dreams and flashbacks figure large. The themes centre on their past lives juxtaposed with present experience; these contrasts between life in China and life in exile are achieved by flashbacks, often in the form of dreams or out-of-body experiences. The latter help to reinforce a sense of unreality experienced by the narrators in the initial stage of living abroad. Their political messages are oblique: the Chinese people are described as oppressed.

The main themes are loss and the fear of loss; impotence and sterility; introspection; madness; and cultural comparisons.

The loss of voice is expressed in the motif song by Xu Xing and in the motif deafness by Yo Yo, but also in the fear of impotence and sterility. The loss of politeness is lamented in Liu Sola's work and the loss of one's private pleasures and

of 'songs' in Xu Xing's work. Other motifs are childhood memories and dreams, frequently employed by Yo Yo and Liu Sola, occasionally employed by Duoduo. Xu Xing avoids the motif dream by escaping into the genre of fable: his stories are least explicitly about exile but features similar motifs, most noticeably in "The city which lost its song".

The most commonly used images to express nostalgia are food, dreams of childhood and the beauty of Chinese characters. The Chinese language is described as beautiful, easy to learn and intuitive, as opposed to English which is structurally too logical for Duoduo or German that is too harsh-sounding for the narrator in Yo Yo's "Casting Anchor". Yo Yo's protagonist goes out of her way just to see a Chinese character; Duoduo's Li spends his time in restaurants for the same purpose. Xu Xing's characters are afraid of losing their voices, or of becoming coarse. Nearly all protagonists suffer from a perceived loss of voice and only Liu Sola's can compensate this loss with music. In her case, the loss is highlighted by her irritation at certain kinds of Western music so that the compensation is hardly satisfactory.

The East-West comparisons common to their works often betray the authors' surprise at how different the West turned out to be in comparison to their expectations. Yet the West is still seen as a monolithic, predominantly non-Chinese culture; none of the four writers explore differences in the cultures of their different host countries; that Australia has different season is one of the few exceptions.

This indifference to their host countries is evidence that the main concern of the exiles is the writers themselves. Liu Sola has been criticised for her self-indulgence, and the same criticism could be levelled at Yo Yo. Their cultural alienation shown in this self-obsession and self-centredness explains the isolation described in the stories such as Liu Sola's narrator in "Men piling on men". Her

isolation leads to hatred of other people, but is also expressed in creative energy. An inability to communicate (most immediate description of which can be found in Yo Yo's "Deaf") are seen as a beginning madness, of which soliloquies and psychosomatic illnesses are the symptoms.

A motif commonly associated with exile is guilt: guilt at not being able to change the situation at home, at having left loved ones, at having escaped when others did not, at being able to live a more secure or more successful life, and at having achieved fame for one's flight rather than one's achievements. The latter is evident in Duoduo's case. Artistically he expressed this in his poem "In England":¹ "it is my wings that bring me fame", "shame is my address".² Yet in his prose work there are only few traces of this guilt. The same applies to Yo Yo's stories. The less complex protagonists of Liu Sola and Xu Xing are too much caught in their own world even to empathise with the outside world, never mind feel guilt. Personal statements on public occasions, however, show a sense of guilt more obviously than in their short stories. Xu Xing's outburst on the Heidelberg conference is a good example of this, as is Yo Yo's disassociation with other exiles and downplaying her own status at public readings. This low profile, although not always strictly maintained, might also explain why few Chinese exiles have ever come out in public support for persecuted or banished authors from different countries. The most notable exemptions to this are the

¹ Duoduo, "Zai Yinggelan", in: *Today* 1990:1 (v.10), p.27. For a translation see Maghiel van Crevel, *Language Shattered: contemporary Chinese poetry and Duoduo*, Leiden: CNWS, 1996, pp. 224-225, or Gregory B. Lee in his book *Troubadours, Trumpeters, Troubled Makers: lyricism, nationalism, and hybridity in China and its others*, London: Hurst, 1996, p.139.

² Lee also addresses the issue of guilt, quoting the very same poem in *Troubadours* pp. 139-140; and in "A note on 'I've Always Delighted in a Shaft of Light...'" in: *The Manhattan Review* vol.6:2, Fall 1992, p.13.

relatively high-profile writers Yang Lian and Bei Dao, but of those dealt with here only Duoduo has lent his name to a campaign concerned with non-Chinese writers.³

It has been established that the short stories of this thesis's four key writers can be classified as part of an exile literature: the similarities of setting and form but above all of themes and motifs with exilic properties rules out the description "literature written by exiles", as one would only need to apply the latter term to describe a genre of less easily definable boundaries, with a greater variety of themes. The writers themselves, however, have at times denied their exile status and the absence of a political message is the most striking feature to support that view. Instead, the authors have turned away from wider issues concerning politics in their homeland. Most have turned towards self-reflection, displaying an ego-centrality attitude towards their life in exile. Yo Yo in particular, and to some extent Liu Sola, develop themes of feminism and the role of woman, abroad as well as home. An ambiguous relationship to sexuality can be found in Duoduo's work, replacing the overtly political. The same is true for Yo Yo. Only Xu Xing seems to have followed Strelka's assumption that the exile "simply transfers the accent from the physically real world of specified particulars to the symbolic and general rendering of that world."⁴ In that sense, the simplicity of his stories hides the political comment.

Yet there is one fundamental difference between the choice of setting in the short stories of the four key writers and the choice made by the émigré. In the

³ In this case, Duoduo co-signed (together with Liu Binyan and several other scholars and authors from many countries) a public letter in support of Salman Rushdie. See: "Help Salman Rushdie!" letter to the *New York Review of Books*, vol. 37:6, April 12 1990, p.52.

⁴ Joseph P. Strelka, "The novel in exile: types and patterns", in: John M. Spalek and Robert F. Bell (eds.), *Exile: the writer's experience*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1982, pp. 24-31. Quote on p. 25.

autobiographies of Jung Chang or Nien Cheng, the story is set in China in the past, the climax of the plot is the suffering they or their families had to endure, and the solution to the climax is the Happy End: the author has escaped to the West, leaving the impression that everything following on from this will be easy and richly deserved. This entirely neglects the assimilation process and the difficulties of living in a foreign culture. The opposite is the case for the exiles (Xu Xing excepted): regardless of their past experiences, their stories only begin with the moment of exile, the Happy End is the starting point, and it is not necessarily a happy one.

In "Faint", Yo Yo gives some local voices the opportunity to be heard over the uniform hegemony of prescribed use of Chinese language. Although the usage of dialect can be a political act, in particular when Chinese characters are used to convey the sound of dialect words rather than their meaning, Yo Yo uses this stylistic tool for comedy purposes.⁵ She also uses words directly translated from the English, such as "happy eggs" for organic eggs, in "Xiao Meng". Duoduo does not use foreign words, even the place names are sinified. The repetition of words like *xiangnian* (remember), *huainian* or *huaijiu* (yearn for), *xiang guxiang* (to recall one's home) is only evident in one story, Liu Sola's "Men piling on men". The lexical evidence points therefore towards a slow assimilation process but does not allow to draw the conclusion that the writers reflect their status on a lexical level in the language they use.

The self-analysis of the writers leads to the question where they place themselves:

⁵ For instance, in English fiction dialect is "typically associated with objects of comedy and satire." See Geoffrey N. Leech and Michael H. Short (eds.), *Style and Fiction: a linguistic introduction to English fictional prose*, London: Longman, 1981, p. 170.

“One of the central questions of literature in exile is that of literary tradition. Does the exiled writer attempt to fit into the tradition of the country which received him, or does he cling to his native roots, writing chiefly for ‘the folks back home?’ For the most part, the internationalists are the exception.”⁶

Glad’s answer to his own question seems to hold true for the four writers. Some are still trying to adapt to a foreign audience. Yo Yo tried hard to find adequate translators, Xu Xing at first thought that his deal with the *edition Juillard* was only the beginning of a career in the West, Liu Sola proudly presents her books in translation on her webpage, and Duoduo has been the most successful in terms of translations. The latter also claims to have put behind his exile phase, and that the change is mostly evident in being able to live in a world with “better legal systems, material conditions and cultural trends.”⁷ Yet this relative success is not actively pursued in their writings. There is no obvious pandering to a Western audience: cultural references which can only be understood by someone with knowledge of China abound, name-dropping habits so common in Chinese literature continue, and the attraction of exoticism is only ironically mentioned (for instance in Liu’s *Chaos And All That*), but not exploited. Yo Yo’s short stories have, over the years and perhaps influenced by her non-fiction writing, veered away from a Western audience and steered towards an audience in Mainland China. It is hard to discern any conscious decision by the writers, apart from Yo Yo, to target either audience.

⁶ John Glad (ed.), *Literature in Exile*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1990, p. x.

⁷ Duoduo, “Snow is not white”, in: Wan Zhi (ed.), *Breaking the Barriers: Chinese Literature Facing the World – essays from a symposium for Chinese writers at Bommersvik, Sweden 1996*, Stockholm: Olof Palme International Center, 1997, p.77.

For Yo Yo, the following holds true:

“The very trauma of exile is an artistic stimulant. People who might never have taken up the pen under normal circumstances react to exile with a burst of creativity.”⁸

For her, the short story is also the chosen form of exile writing; for her attempt at émigré writing she choose the novel. Even if the stories analysed in the past chapters are not all infused by self-pity, the abundance of self-indulgence and self-pity, even if at times ironically mitigated, show the universality of some of exile writing's aspects.

The criteria for exile literature in the methodology for analysing exile fiction, based on the literary analysis by close reading, shows both the exilic nature of the works of the key writers as well as the differences to other exile literatures. There are enough common features in the work of the key writers to allow their work to be seen as a whole. There are also, as stated above, enough differences to allow lingering doubts on a thematically coherent, identifiably Chinese, exile fiction. The most distinct lack is the absence of political message, or any jointly formulated strategy. The reasons for these have to be looked for outside the text.⁹

⁸ John Glad (ed.), *Literature in Exile*, op. cit., p. viii.

⁹ This and the following paragraphs are based on the article “No past to long for? A sociology of Chinese writers in exile” I published in Michel Hockx (ed.), *The Literary Field of Twentieth Century China*, Richmond: Curzon, 1999, pp. 161-177.

All four key writers are, or have been, members of the same group. Their membership is based on the following criteria: during the 1980s they shared critical regard, they knew each other socially, and some of them worked together on literary projects. They shared a privileged upbringing, were eager to join the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution but were sometimes barred because of their family's background. They were sent to the countryside for short periods (with the exception of Xu Xing who went to gaol instead) and felt the frustration of not being able to engage in a career of their liking after 1978: in Duoduo's case a musical career, in Liu Sola's musical experimentalism and in Yo Yo's various artistic fields. Only Xu Xing never expressed dissatisfaction with his status as waiter, which fitted his image as a non-conformist and also showed his unwillingness to be categorised: for him any job could only ever be temporary, and if at all possible he would prefer not to work and indulge in a Bohemian life-style.¹⁰

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, exile re-united the members of the group. They were all based, at one point, in Europe, and all contributed to the re-launch of *Today*. This involvement in *Today* was initially close: three of the four key writers served on the editorial board, they all attended the founding meeting, and have subsequently attended gatherings, meetings and conferences organised by *Today*. *Today* itself could have served as a starting point for a school, but this never materialised. To start with, the number of exiled writers is small, there are only dozens instead of hundreds, and there has been a distinct lack of alternative groups. Instead, the members of the one existing group failed to embark on a joint strategy and employed individual tactics. Some, like Yo Yo, actively looked to be published in Mainland China, others, like Liu Sola, retreated from the group to explore different

¹⁰ Xiao Qiao, "Xu Xing he ta de nüren he ta de gou" [Xu Xing and his wife and his dog], in:

career opportunities in the U.S., and finally, some writers left exile and returned to China.¹¹

The lack of awareness of their status also played a role:

“But what came next after the Cultural Revolution was the claim of a number of the Democracy Movement generation, in their mid-twenties in the late 1970s, to be in pursuit of ‘pure literature’ and to be apolitical in their art. As will be clear by this point, the very act of their writing both in China and in exile makes that act political. The entrenchment of the exiles’ conviction that a genuine apolitical situation was possible was demonstrated by the apparently genuine, surprised response on the part of some of them, who at that moment even shunned the label ‘exile’, when the Chinese Communist authorities declared the Stockholm-based, relaunched Peking Spring literary magazine, *Today*, a ‘reactionary publication. [...] The naïve yet prevalent wisdom seemed to be that if politics as such was avoided and the designation ‘exile’ avoided, no political action would be taken against them.”¹²

Today’s editorial board’s decision to include contributions from China-based authors moved it further away from providing a platform for an exile school. This

Xiandai ren bao [Modern People], 27 June 1989.

¹¹ Xu Xing is not the only example of return from exile: Bei Ling, the editor of *Tendency* has been in and out of China trying to keep open the *Tendency* bureau in Shanghai. Chen Ran returned after a six-months stay in Australia, explaining it as an unsuccessful stint as a foreign exchange student. It is worth pointing out that the six months in question were six months soon after June Fourth.

¹² Gregory B. Lee, *Troubadours*, op. cit., pp. 132-133. Lee is slightly harsh in his judgement “the naïve wisdom [that] no political action would be taken against them.” The first exile issue of *Today* shows a large number of contributors with obvious pen-names.

policy has now been widened and includes the invitation to China-based writers to conferences such as the Symposium for Chinese Writers at Bommersvik in June and July 1996.

The nature of exile changed continuously for the writers and a development in the exile experience is mirrored in the writing. After the writers had left China, academic institutions often provided the first source of income for these writers: the School of Oriental and African Studies in the cases of Duoduo and Liu Sola, universities in Australia and New Zealand for Yo Yo, and the University of Heidelberg in Xu Xing's case. After an initial period of support, grants and scholarships from arts councils and other bodies allowed them to continue their career in the absence of any sizeable income from royalties.

This, too, proved to be a transitory period. Xu Xing returned to China and now lives in his parental home, presumably living off a minimum income supplemented by odd-jobs. Liu Sola has established herself in the musical scene of New York and, as a mark of success, has been able to found her own production company. Yo Yo mainly works as a Chinese language instructor to make ends meet. Duoduo has not held any scholarships after 1996, suggesting that he can exist from his income as a writer and columnist.

Liu Sola, Yo Yo and Duoduo have made long-term commitments to their respective host countries: Liu owns a company, Yo Yo an apartment in central London, and Duoduo has now a family in the Netherlands. Yo Yo is still experimenting with new genres, possibly because she had been under the least pressure to adapt: she is the one writer whose relationship with a Chinese partner survived the vicissitudes of exile which has also given her some assistance in

economical terms. Xu Xing has returned to China. The initial period of travelling seems to be over.

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